

TAUNTON'S

DECEMBER 1994/JANUARY 1995 NO.6

fine COOKING

FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO COOK



**AN AFGHAN
MENU**

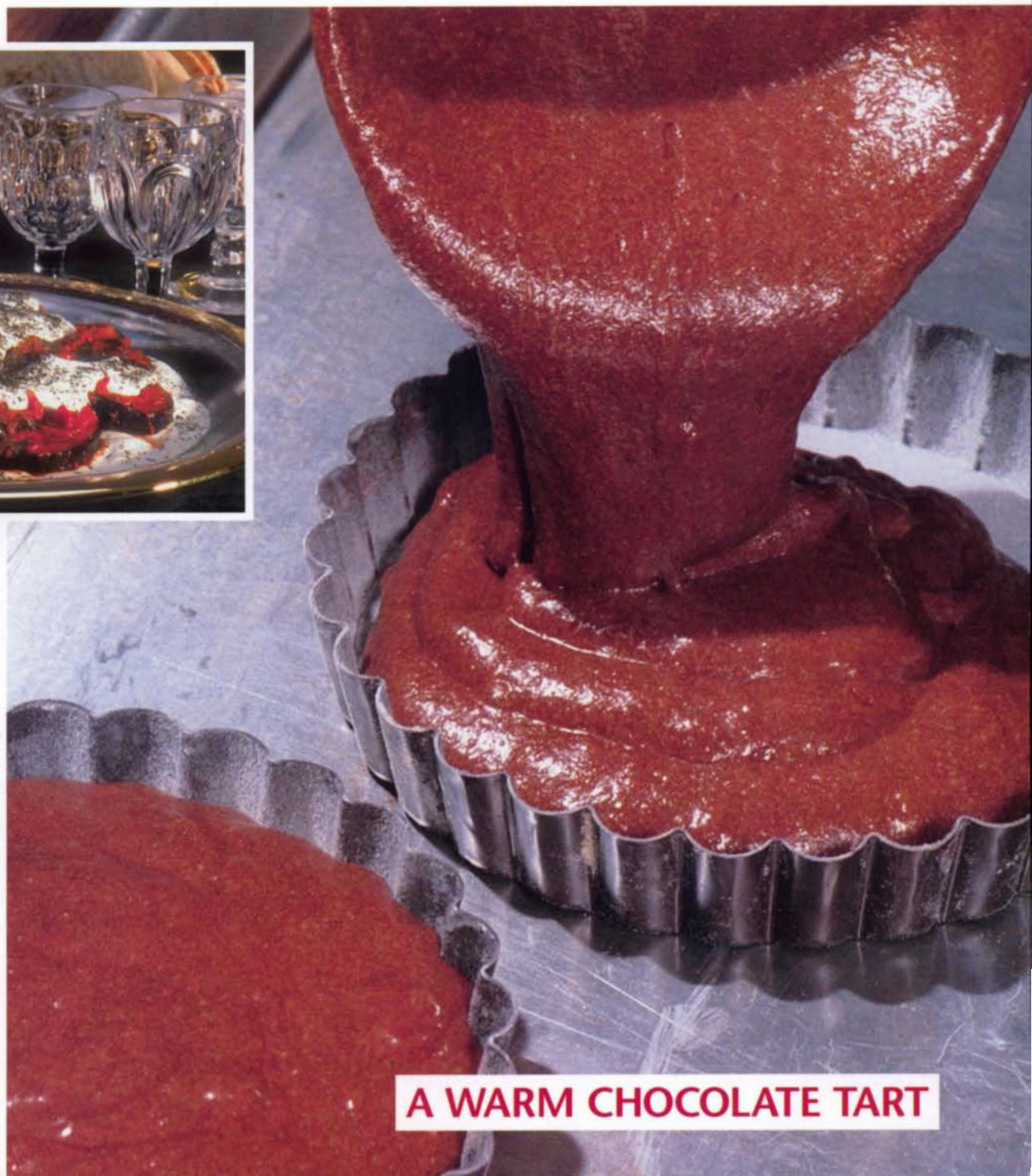
**MASHED
POTATOES**

FOIE GRAS

**SPARKLING
WINES**

1994 INDEX

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DECEMBER 1994 / JANUARY 1995 ISSUE 6

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Cover photo, Suzanne Roman; inset, Susan Kahn.
This page: top, Suzanne Roman; middle, Dana Harris;
bottom, Martha Holmberg.

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START YOUR POTATOES!

Your article on sourdough bread (*Fine Cooking* #2, p. 34) was intriguing. I'm an old hand at bread-baking, but I'm brand-new to sourdough. I've ordered the catalog from Sourdoughs International, Inc., but I'd appreciate a real recipe for the potato starter from Phil Van Kirk.

—Tamara Gruber,
Houston, TX

Phil Van Kirk replies: When I wrote the article, I didn't include a recipe for the potato starter because I had no idea how to duplicate it. The starter was a gift from another baker. Happily, I now have a good idea how anyone can create an effective version easily at home. The idea came from a *Fine Cooking* reader, and a fine idea it was.

Creating a potato starter will take about a week. First, boil three large Idaho potatoes until soft. Then blend them briefly with ½ cup sugar and add enough water to make about a quart of liquefied potatoes. The consistency should be like that of a thin gravy. Blend only long enough to make the lumps disappear; if you blend too long, the mixture gets gummy. Let the mixture cool until lukewarm.

Store half of the mixture in the refrigerator. Put the other half in a large container (at least a half-gallon in capacity) that is made of ceramic, glass, or plastic and has a loose-fitting lid. Add a package of yeast and mix well. Put the container in a moderately warm place (about 70°F is good, but keep it below 80°). Stir the mixture a couple of times a day for the next three days. Keep the lid on the starter while it sits, but be sure to give it a good dose of fresh air each time you mix it. After three days, take the other half of the potato mixture out of the refrigerator, let it warm to room tem-

perature, and add it to your large container. The mixture will bubble energetically over the next 12 hours. Leave the container out at 70° for a few more days, stirring it at least twice a day as before. By the sixth or seventh day, the mixture is ready to use for breadmaking.

Keep the finished starter in the refrigerator. When your starter runs low, feed it another lukewarm meal of sweetened, liquefied potatoes. However, don't keep the starter at room temperature for more than two days at a time, or it may spoil. Feed the starter at least once every two or three weeks to keep it active, but more frequent meals are fine and serve to increase the culture's vigor. Its leavening power is strongest right after feeding, but unlike most other sourdough starters, it will stay viable for breadmaking for up to two weeks after feeding.

I performed some tests with both my inherited potato starter and a potato starter made as described above, using identical recipes and ingredients. The doughs rose for 13 hours prior to baking. Both batches rose vigorously and comparably, in and out of the oven. The loaves were also identical in terms of crust color, sourness, and crumb (which was springy and moist).

I hope you find the time to try this starter—it makes exceptional bread.

HERE A FIG, THERE A FIG, EVERYWHERE A FIG FIG

I chuckled for a good long while after reading Jan Stetson's "A Fig Too Far" (*Fine Cooking* #4, p. 82). Our 100-year-old fig tree is so prolific that we get the snow shovel out a few months early to clear off the patio. Fig chutney, anyone?

—Sarah Vocelka,
Grass Valley, CA

CANNING METHOD CLARIFIED

Editor's note: Jeanne Lesem, author of "Putting Up Preserves" (Basics, p. 75, *Fine Cooking* #5) wants to clarify her instructions for canning with the water-bath method. You don't really need to sterilize the jars before filling them. Simply wash them in warm, soapy water and then rinse them thoroughly in hot water. When you're boiling the filled jars, be sure that they're covered by one to two inches of water. This will equal-

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Writing an article

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OK, ALREADY!

In response to several readers' requests, here's the recipe for Chef Handke's roasted tomato sauce, which was shown on p. 54 of his article, "Beyond Plain Pork," in *Fine Cooking* #3.

OVEN-ROASTED TOMATO SAUCE

Yields about 3 cups.

2 lb. tomatoes
1 Tbs. chopped fresh basil
1 Tbs. chopped fresh oregano
1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary
1 tsp. chopped garlic
¼ cup olive oil
Chicken stock (optional)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 325°F.

Core the tomatoes and chop them into quarters. Blend the herbs, garlic, and olive oil, and then toss the tomatoes in the herbed oil.

Put the tomatoes on a sheet pan and roast them for 30 min. Remove and cool.

Put the tomatoes in a blender and purée until smooth. Add a little chicken stock if the sauce seems too thick. Season with salt and pepper. If you want a very smooth texture, strain through a fine sieve.

FLATTERY, WITH A HUMBLE OPINION

Having carefully studied the first four issues of *Fine Cooking*, I can give my (not too humble) opinion that it is now the

most comprehensive, best edited, and most useful food magazine on the market. Of course, I'm building up to a couple of observations. First, I was a bit disappointed that you didn't include an article, in this harvesttime issue, on pickling and preserving. I know that there are many books in print on this subject, but somehow I thought you would have a different approach with some unique recipes.

Now comes my highly emotional comment. The article entitled "Stuffing Peppers Mexican Style," (*Fine Cooking* #4, p. 60) with a subtitle, "Everything from plain cheese to savory meat and fruit *picadillo* tastes wonderful in *chiles relenos*" really caused me some emotional distress. Do you not know there's no such thing as "peppers" in Mexico? (Nor do I believe that the term should be used in polite English-language societies.) In Mexico you will find 40 or 50 different varieties of chiles, including the sweet varieties you commonly refer to as peppers, but not one reference to peppers.

In Australia, the term for this fruit is "capsicum," a much more civilized term. May I humbly suggest that you use this instead of the misnomer "pepper"?

—David M. Stevens,
El Paso, TX

BROKEN REPLY FOR BROKEN GANACHE

Allow me to bring to your attention an error in the transcription of my letter that you printed in *Fine Cooking* #4, p. 4, under the heading, "Keeping Ganache Together: Part II." As you can see from the enclosed copy of the letter, the broken ganache must be slowly incorpo-

rated into the cream, not vice versa as described in the printed version. The procedure described in the magazine will only result in a slightly more broken ganache.

—Jim Graham,
Wheeling, IL

Editor's note: We sincerely apologize for the error. In our enthusiasm to communicate Mr. Graham's ganache solution, we didn't transcribe it properly. So, for the record: "A small amount of cream (¼ cup) is boiled to sterilize it. The ganache mixture is whisked into the hot cream very slowly at first, with a gradual increase in rate as the operation progresses."

EVERY VINEGAR HAS A MOTHER

I have been in the wine business for more than 13 years, and I feel that Mark Wessels' answer to the question about storing leftover wine missed an additional idea, while propagating a myth about "bad" wine (*Fine Cooking* #2, p. 8). For many years, I've added sterilized glass marbles to opened wine bottles in order to bring the level of the wine to the bottom of the cork. Wine will turn "bad," or oxidize, with prolonged exposure to oxygen, just as metal will rust. However, it will not become vinegar. Wine cannot become vinegar unless there is a "mother," the acetic bacteria that ferments wine, turning it into vinegar. This bacteria can form naturally, but manufacturers prefer to control the bacteria by adding it during the vinegar-making process.

—Gary T. Farakash,
Hewlett, NY ♦

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for fellow enthusiasts

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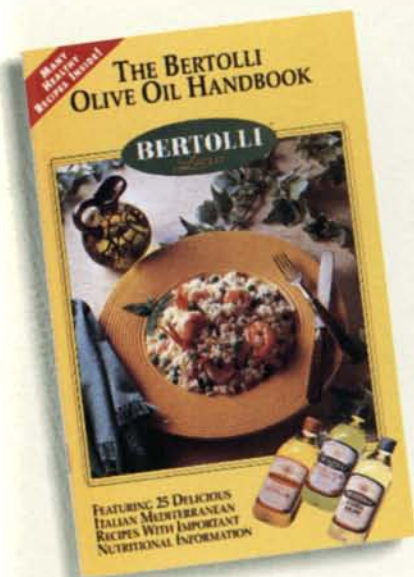
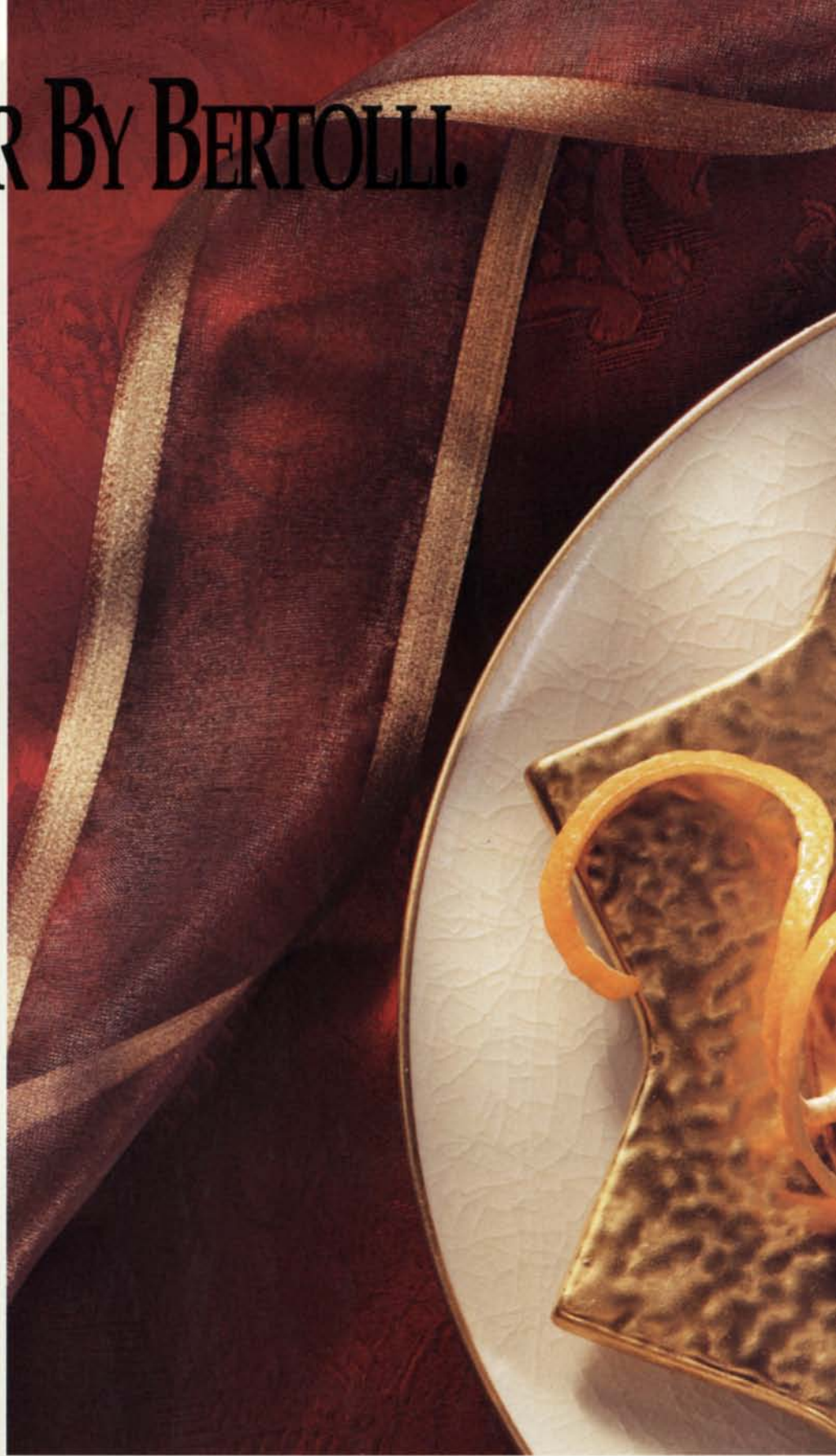
3 cups flour	3 cups shredded, unpeeled zucchini
1 1/2 cups sugar	
2 tsp. cinnamon	1 1/2 cups dark raisins
1 tsp. salt	1 1/2 cups golden raisins
1 tsp. baking powder	1 cup walnuts, chopped
1 tsp. baking soda	2 tsp. vanilla
3 large eggs	1 cup Bertolli Extra Light Olive Oil

In a large bowl mix together the flour, sugar, cinnamon, salt, baking powder, baking soda, zucchini, raisins and nuts. In another bowl beat together the eggs, vanilla and olive oil. Pour over flour mixture and stir until thoroughly mixed. Pour batter into 12 greased individual Bundt® molds to 2/3 full. Bake at 350°F for 30-35 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean or pour batter into two 9x5-inch loaf pans, baking at 350°F for 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Lemon Icing

1 1/2 cups confectioner's sugar
1 tsp. lemon zest
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In a small bowl, combine all icing ingredients. Drizzle on room-temperature cake.



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MINERAL OIL SAFE FOR CUTTING BOARDS

For years, I've used a coat of mineral oil to finish my cutting boards, but recently I've heard that mineral oil (a refined petroleum product) may be harmful to my health. But I've also heard that vegetable oils can become rancid. What's the best oil to keep cutting boards from drying out?

—Byron Papa, Chapel Hill, NC

Chris Minnick replies: Mineral oil is perfectly safe to use on your cutting boards—if you choose the correct grade. The mineral oil that's sold in pharmacies as a laxative is refined to the point of being a food-grade product. A mineral oil especially formulated for cutting boards is available in some cookware shops, such as Williams-Sonoma. However, the mineral oil you buy at hardware stores is intended as a lubricant and is not as highly refined. Linseed oil is also ill-advised, since it contains small amounts of metallic dryers to which some people are highly sensitive.

Vegetable oils like soybean and canola are nondrying and are susceptible to bacteria, but walnut oil is an excellent choice for finishing cutting boards. Since walnut oil dries, there's nothing for bacteria to feed upon. The drying also creates a protective film that provides your board with greater and longer-lasting protection. *Chris Minnick is a finishing chemist and owns Minnick & Sons Woodworking in Stillwater, Minnesota.*

SALT AND BREAD GLUTEN

Why does salt produce a stronger, tougher gluten in bread dough? I would think salt would dry the gluten and make it brittle; instead, salt seems to make gluten more elastic.

—Teri Roehring, Zanesville, OH

Jane Davis replies: You're right to note that salt has a toughening effect on gluten, but salt does not make gluten more elastic. Gluten, the protein in wheat, has two elements: glutenin is the

“strong” element and gliadin is the “elastic” element. These elements need to balance. Gluten and yeast act together to form the special chemical structure of “risen” bread, and this is where salt is so important. Yeast creates carbon-dioxide bubbles as it grows, causing the rubber-band-like strands of gluten to stretch and giving yeast bread its characteristic structure and shape. Too much salt will dehydrate the yeast and prevent it from performing properly. As a result, the strong element of gluten will dominate the elastic element, and the bread will be tough and dense. Therefore, never add salt directly to dissolved yeast.

Jane Davis owns Ganache, a bakery in Evanston, Illinois.

WHAT IS HARTSHORN?

My mother has recipes for Christmas cookies handed down from her grandmother. These German recipes call for hartshorn (or baking ammonia). Did hartshorn originally come from deer's antlers? Can baking powder or baking soda be substituted? If so, how would either affect the cookie?

—Margie Gibson, Washington, DC

Cherie Phelan replies: Hartshorn is the common name for ammonium carbonate, a heat-triggered leavening agent. Hartshorn predates baking powder by hundreds of years, and at one time it actually was made from deer's antlers. When exposed to air and high temperatures, hartshorn breaks down to form ammonia and carbon dioxide, two gaseous compounds. The released gas is responsible for the rise, or leavening, of baked goods. Ammonia gas has a particularly strong and disagreeable taste and odor, so the use of hartshorn is usually limited to baked goods that have a porous structure (such as éclairs and some cookies) in order to ensure all the ammonia gas bakes out of the product.

Weather conditions could play a role in hartshorn's effectiveness if it isn't stored properly. Hartshorn should be stored in a tightly closed container in a cool place to avoid exposure to air, moisture, and heat. Improper storage will result in baked goods that have low volume and poor cell structure. Baking powder or baking soda could be substituted for hartshorn in a

cookie recipe, but the substitution means higher cookies that spread less and are less regular in shape. And since both baking powder and baking soda contain sodium, any salt in the recipe should be reduced. *Cherie Phelan is a food technologist for the Monsanto Chemical Group in St. Louis, Missouri.*

RAAB OR RAPINI, THIS BROCCOLI IS STRONG STUFF

From various sources, I have heard that broccoli raab is related to beet greens, mustard greens, and Chinese broccoli. Exactly what is broccoli raab?

—Harold J. Santare, New York, NY

Olgo Russo replies: Whether you call it *raab*, *rapini*, *rape*, or *rabe*, this member of the broccoli family has a sharp, robust, and distinctive broccoli flavor quite without the sweetness of the head broccoli most people know. Broccoli raab is related to the turnip and to standard broccoli, but it doesn't have broccoli florets. Instead, it has slimmer stems, fuller leaves, and flowers, all of which are edible. The only preparation needed is rinsing and trimming the ends of larger stalks. Cut or chop the broccoli raab as it best suits the dish. It lends itself to steaming and sautéing (it's great in stir-fries), and it's a popular element in pasta dishes, where its brisk flavor can shine against the mildly flavored noodles.

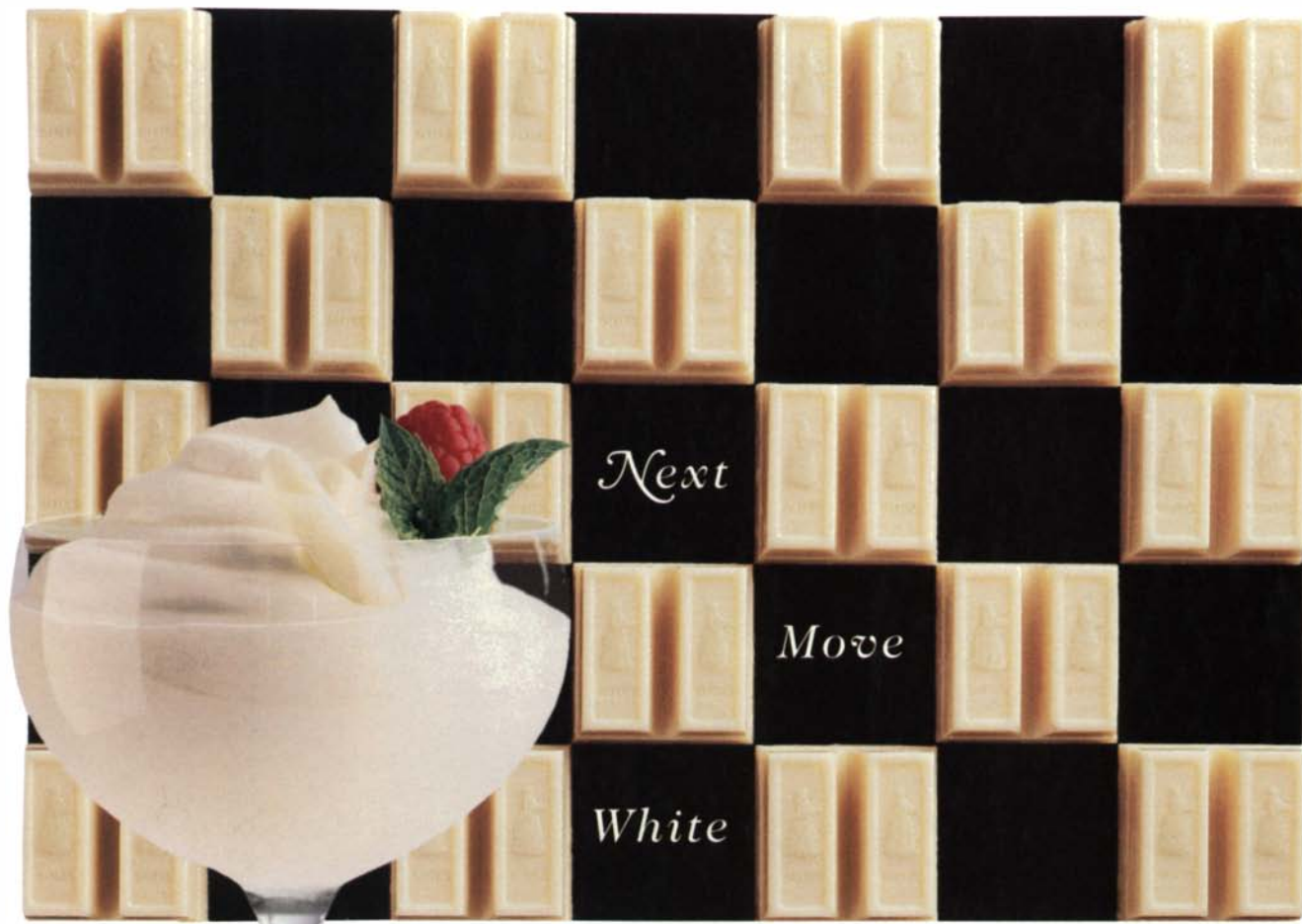
Olgo Russo is the vice president of sales and distribution for A. Russo and Sons, Inc., an 85-year-old wholesale fruit and vegetable distributorship in Watertown, Massachusetts.

SAFE TO EAT RAW DOUGH?

We make bread at least weekly, and my children love to eat the dough (provided it's eggless, of course). Is live yeast safe to eat?

—Joanne Kellar Bouknight, Greenwich, CT

Shannon McKinney replies: Live yeast is actually a microscopic plant cell that feeds off the sugar and flour in most bread recipes. The resulting “fermentation” produces carbon-dioxide gas (and a small amount of alcohol); this is what makes dough rise. This fermentation continues until the yeast reaches a temperature of 138°F in your oven, at which



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MICROWAVE white chocolate and 1/4 cup of the cream in large micro-waveable bowl on HIGH 2 minutes or until white chocolate is almost melted, stirring halfway through heating time. Stir until white chocolate is completely melted. Cool 20 minutes or until room temperature, stirring occasionally.

BEAT remaining 1 1/4 cups cream in chilled medium bowl with electric mixer on medium speed until soft peaks form. DO NOT OVERBEAT. Fold 1/2 of the whipped cream into white chocolate mixture. Fold in remaining whipped cream just until blended. Spoon into dessert dishes.

REFRIGERATE 2 hours or until ready to serve. Garnish as desired. Makes 6 (1/2-cup) servings.



For additional white chocolate recipes, call
1-800-422-5377 from November 1-January 6.

point the yeast cells can no longer live. Eating raw dough in small amounts is not harmful, as the yeast cells could not survive in the acid levels present in the digestive system. Still, I wouldn't eat raw bread dough after it enters the later stages of the rising process. Dough left to rise for any lengthy period of time can pick up objectionable bacteria, wild yeast, or both, which are naturally present in normal kitchen surroundings.

Shannon McKinney co-owns and operates McKinney & Doyle's Corner Bakery in Pawling, New York; it was selected by Redbook last year as one of the five finest bakeries in the United States.

COOLING FOOD SAFELY

Why must food be cooled to room temperature before putting it in the refrigerator? Wouldn't it be safer to refrigerate it immediately?

—A. Lynne Graburn, Albany, NY

John Struzik replies: Neither immediate refrigeration nor long cooling at

room temperature is the right solution for safe food storage. When food is left in the "danger zone" (between 45° and 140°F) for too long a time, bacteria grows rapidly. When hot food is placed in the refrigerator, it can enter and remain in the "danger zone" long enough for it to spoil. This is especially true with large quantities of food—a large pot of hot stock, for instance. Hot food also fights the cooling system, which can damage the refrigerator condenser by forcing it to work too hard. Also, the heat from hot food can contribute to the spoilage of surrounding, fragile food in the refrigerator.

The solution? To keep food out of the danger zone as much as possible, cooked food should be rapidly chilled in shallow pans or in an ice-water bath, and stirred and agitated frequently during the chilling process. While this may seem like a lot of effort, it's the only way to ensure that you're storing food safely.

John Struzik is the assistant director of the Baltimore International Culinary College.

THE WELL-SEASONED SKILLET


How do you season a skillet?

—Esther Sternin, Bridgewater, NJ

Drew Allen replies: Cast-iron and carbon-steel cookware are slightly porous, so they need seasoning, a process that acts as a sealant. To season, smear shortening or cooking oil (such as canola) on the inside of the pan and set the pan over low heat for five minutes. Wipe the pan dry and repeat the process at least once. The more repetitions, the better the pan's seasoning will be.

If you're careful when cooking with a seasoned pan (that is, you don't let food burn, which means the pan would require scrubbing to clean), you can maintain the seasoning by rubbing the pan clean with paper towels instead of washing it with soap and a scrub brush or sponge. If the pan needs hard scrubbing or you cook with very acidic ingredients, you'll have to reseason it. But take heart: a seasoned pan only improves with age and use.

Drew Allen is the chef/owner of the Liberty Bar in San Antonio, Texas. ♦



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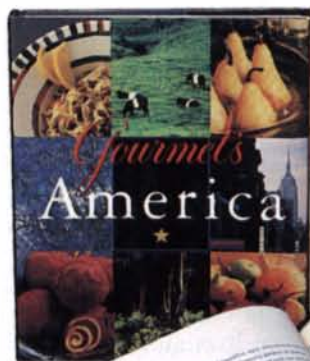
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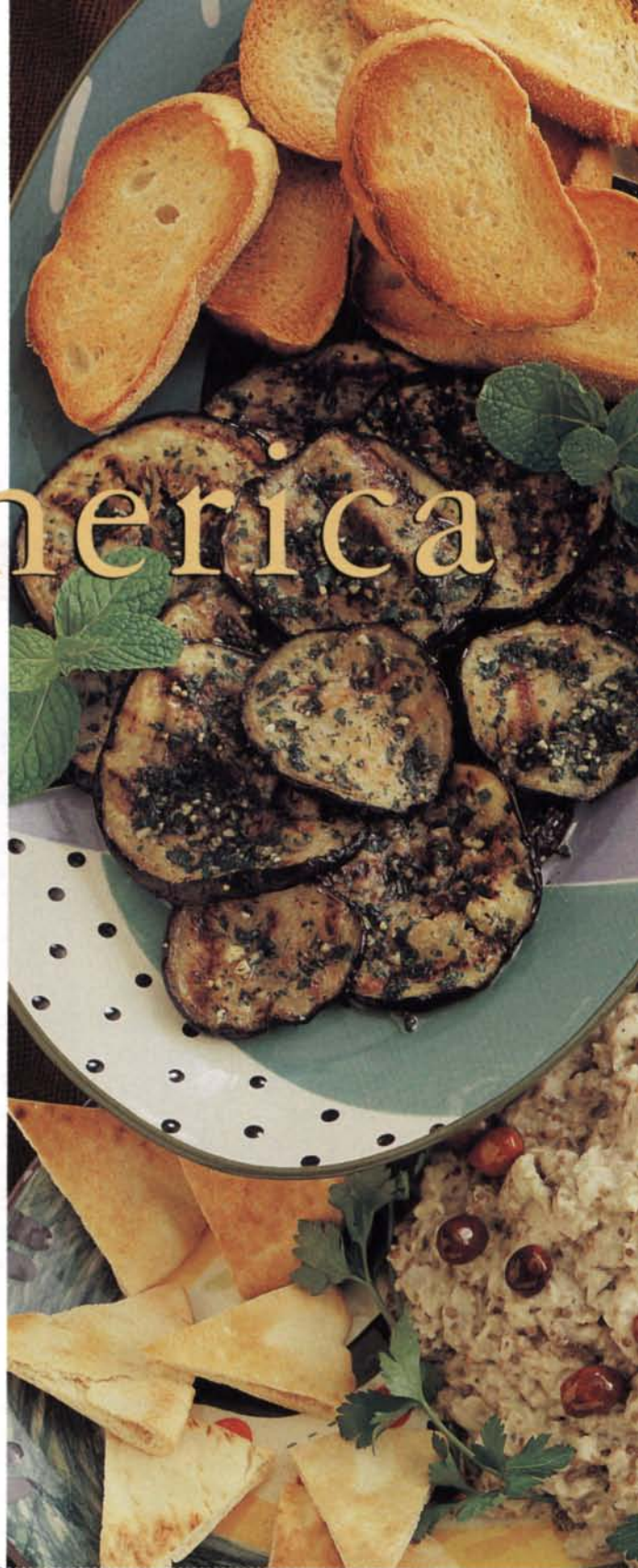
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Tabasco Green

Working as a chef in New Orleans, I stumble across lots of hot sauces. These sauces can be as different as the peppers they're made from, and although there are certainly some old standbys in my kitchen, I find that I'm always trying the new ones.

McIlhenny, maker of the 125-year-old Tabasco sauce, has recently introduced its new green Jalapeño Sauce; it's known on the streets as Tabasco Green. McIlhenny's original red Tabasco sauce is made from a blend of ripened red capicum peppers, which can range from hot to sweet in flavor, but the less ripened green jalapeño chile, the most popular chile in the United States, yields a totally different flavor.

Tabasco Green has a crisp, bright, tangy flavor. In terms of overall heat, it's much milder than the original Tabasco. The front flavors of the Jalapeño Sauce remind me of vine-ripened tomatoes with a smooth pepper middle and finish. I taste accents of mango, citrus, and pineapple in the sauce, making it a perfect addition to tropical fruit salsas.

I like to use this sauce straight on fried oysters and on grilled fish. At Commander's Palace, we've used Tabasco Green as a flavoring for a green-chile *beurre blanc* sauce, where it also imparts a nice, light green color; we often serve this *beurre blanc* with sautéed snapper and baked bananas. Tabasco Green is great in grill marinades and added to cold emulsion sauces, such as *rémoulade* and *ravigote*. We also like to add it to a shrimp *sauté* with pepper jelly.

Tabasco Jalapeño Sauce is available in some supermarkets, but it can be difficult to find—even in New Orleans. Luckily, Tabasco Green can be ordered directly from the McIlhenny Company through the Tabasco Country Store. To order, call 800/634-9599. The suggested retail price for a 5-ounce bottle is \$2.50.

—Jamie Shannon, executive chef at Commander's Palace, New Orleans

The Indian Spice Kitchen



Recognizing what a daunting task it can be to locate, identify, and learn how to cook with Indian spices, Culinary Alchemy of California has developed the Indian Spice Kitchen. The kit includes 24 spices and other ingredients commonly used in Indian cuisine. Among these are whole green cardamom pods, fenugreek, asafoetida, amchoor, basmati rice, and dried tamarind fruit. The kit is equipped with enough raw ingredients for about thirty dishes.

Providing the curious cook with the proper ingredients is only part of the package. Madhur Jaffrey, a respected Indian cookbook author, has written a special cookbook to accompany the kit, called *Madhur Jaffrey's Spice Kitchen*. The book, which contains about fifty recipes, was designed specifically to accompany the spices in the kit, and there are sections explaining the spices, as well as general advice about roasting, grinding, and cooking with them. Menu recommendations, cultural information, and other helpful tips

about Indian cooking are also included.

The Spice Kitchen is beautifully packaged. Each component is stored in its own elaborately illustrated metal container, and the box in which they're arranged has botanical drawings, maps of India, and historical facts about the spice trade.

The Spice Kitchen, which costs \$44.95, is available at several department stores (including Nordstroms, Neiman Marcus, and Macy's), at Dean & DeLuca in New York City, and at many local gourmet and cookware stores. For local retailers, or to order directly from Culinary Alchemy, call 415/367-1455.

—Matthew Kestenbaum, Fine Cooking

Organic Food at Your Fingertips

Although many consumers have taken notice of organically raised food, supermarkets often have a limited assortment of such specialty products, and most communities don't have stores specifically dedicated to organic foods.

The National Organic Directory is a complete guide to the organic food market. The directory lists more than a thousand organic farmers and wholesalers, providing contact names, available services, certification groups, and other useful information. More than 200 of the businesses listed will ship directly to consumers. The directory also has a register of organic foods that are currently being produced.

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) publishes this directory annually as part of its effort to bring family farmers and concerned citizens together. *The National Organic Directory* costs \$34.95, plus \$5 shipping (California residents must add 7.25% sales tax). To order, call 800/852-3832; Visa and MasterCard are accepted.

—M.K.

Fish Facts

You probably know what tuna looks like out of the can or halibut out of the broiler, but do you know what these fish look like alive? Illustrations of these and 73 other fish are profiled in the



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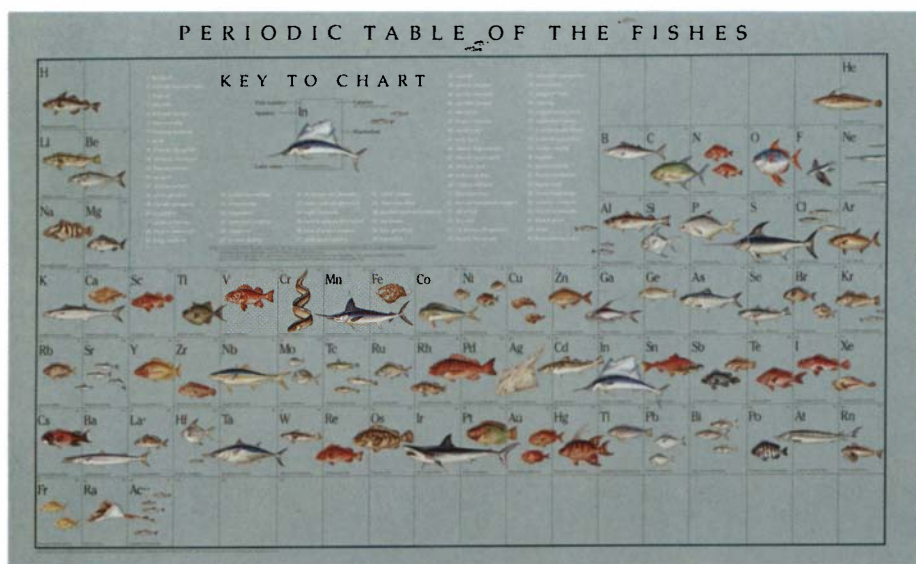
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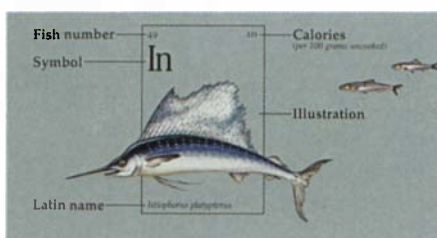


The look that cooks!



poster called the "Periodic Table of the Fishes." The chart, inspired by Mendeleev's 1869 periodic table of the elements, is informative as well as beautiful.

The full-color illustrations of fish are surrounded by other useful bits of information. Caloric estimates flank the pictures, given for 100-gram (approx-



mately 4-ounce) portions of uncooked fish. The proper Latin name of each fish and its common English names are listed in a numbered index. With only a few exceptions, the fish illustrated are excellent for eating.

The "Periodic Table of the Fishes" is the latest in a series of similar tables from Naomi Weissman, a California artist. Also in this series are charts profiling vegetables, fruits and nuts, and desserts. Other culinary posters conceived by Weissman feature individual ingredients such as tomatoes, onions, peppers, eggplants, and herbs.

Printed on heavy poster stock, the poster measures 21½x34 inches and costs \$26; add \$4.75 for shipping.

The "Periodic Table of the Fishes" and other posters are published by Food for Thought of Berkeley, California. To order the poster or to receive a catalog, write to Food for Thought, 1442A Walnut St., Berkeley, CA 94709; or call 800/666-5436.

—M.K. ♦

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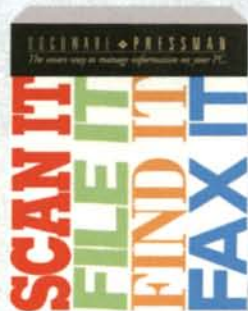
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- 4 large trout fillets [about 2 pounds total]
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Do you have a clever way to peel vegetables, marinate meats, or keep herbs tasting fresh? Is there a household tool that serves a second function in your kitchen? Share your shortcuts and tricks with fellow readers by writing to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. We pay for tips we publish.

Easy-to-Squeeze Lemons



Try this method to produce lemon wedges that are great looking, easy to squeeze, less wasteful of juice, and have no pits. With a sharp knife, you can prepare them in seconds.

First slice off each end of the lemon. The squared ends will provide a good grip to hold the lemon wedge between your thumb and index finger. Next, cut the lemon in half lengthwise. Cut out the white fibers in the middle of each half by making a V-shaped incision with your knife. Use the tip of the knife to dig out any pits remaining in the lemon. Cut each half into segments and serve.

—J.J. Jackson, Victoria, BC

Peeling Garlic Gently

One of the most popular recipes I teach is a roasted chicken stuffed with 48 unbroken cloves of garlic. Peeling all that garlic by smashing it with the broad side of a knife is not only a chore, but also

ruins the presentation of the slowly roasted cloves. To peel a garlic clove quickly and easily without breaking it, simply put the clove in the microwave and heat at 100% power for approximately ten seconds. The heat generated will create a burst of steam that loosens the papery skin from the garlic. Remove the garlic from the microwave, and then grasp one end and gently press the clove against the counter. The garlic will pop right out of its skin. You can do several cloves at a time, just increase the time in the microwave by about two seconds for each additional clove.

—Ray L. Overton, III,
The Georgia Lifestyles Learning Center,
Roswell, GA

Damming the Stuffing

Instead of trussing a turkey or chicken to keep in the stuffing, I cover the stuffing with a heel from a loaf of bread. This seals in the stuffing and keeps the juices from dripping out.

—Betsy Schwartz, Greenwich, CT

Avoiding Chile Burns

When handling chile peppers, especially the very hot habañeros and piquins, put your hands inside plastic produce bags from the grocery store to avoid getting the juice from the chiles on your hands. Nothing hurts more than inadvertently rubbing your eyes after touching hot chiles.

—Vincent Becker, Phoenix, AZ

Keeping Parsley Fresh

I keep my parsley fresh by treating it like a bunch of flowers. First I check the rubber band that holds the bunch together. If it's too tight, I loosen it, but I don't remove it. Then I cull any crushed, soggy, or otherwise questionable material out of the bunch. I put some water in a tall mug, stick the stems of the parsley into the mug, cover loosely with a plastic bag, and put the whole thing in the refrigerator towards the back—out of harm's way. I have fresh parsley whenever I need it. I just pluck out a few stalks, rinse, and use. I find that it lasts for a few weeks this way.

—Patricia A. Janney, Kingston, NY

Rising Dough

Recipes for making bread suggest putting the unrisen dough in a greased bowl, turning the dough to coat it, and covering the dough with plastic wrap. If you're lazy like I am, use a large, airtight, plastic container, such as a 5-liter Rubbermaid storage container. Just scoop in the dough and seal the container with the plastic lid. There's no need to coat it with butter or oil. If the air in your kitchen is very dry, though, brush the top of the dough with warm water. Mark the height you want the dough to rise to (usually double its original height) with a piece of masking tape so you'll know when it has risen sufficiently. When the dough has risen, just pull it out of the container.

—D.C. Church, Corvallis, OR

Homemade Brown Sugar

If you find yourself out of brown sugar and have a recipe requiring it, you can do what many manufacturers of brown sugar do—add molasses to white sugar. First measure out the white sugar to the quantity of brown sugar called for, and then add dark molasses by the tablespoon until you reach the desired darkness. To make light brown sugar, use less molasses; to make dark brown sugar, use more.

—Diana T. Widman, Old Tappan, NJ

Snipping Dried Tomatoes

I have always hated trying to cut leather-tough sun-dried tomatoes with a knife, especially after they've been soaked in oil or water. A far easier method is to cut them dry with kitchen scissors. Before soaking them, I snip them into thin strips with the scissors.

—Sheryl Hurd-House, Jupiter, FL



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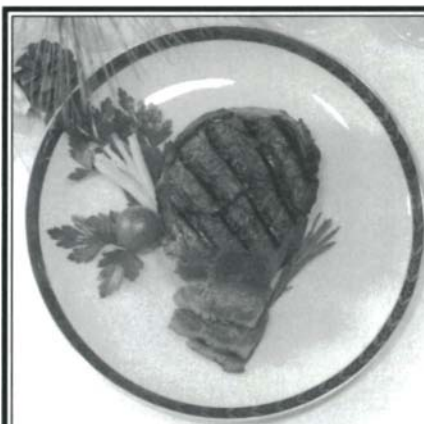
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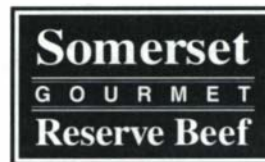
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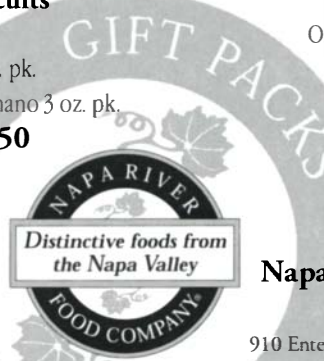
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Easy Cooked Spinach

Boiling fast-cooking fresh spinach in a large pot of water was always a chore. Even though cooked spinach doesn't take up much room, fresh spinach is quite bulky and requires a large amount of boiling water and a big pot in which to fit it all. Heating up the water and then putting the spinach into the pot only to take it right out again to drain

was both messy and time-consuming.

Now I simply leave the spinach in the colander where I have just rinsed it and heat water in my teakettle. When the whistle blows, I pour the boiling water directly onto the spinach and let it drain right in the sink. Not only is it quicker to boil a few cups of water in the kettle, it's less messy and there's less chance for it to overcook since it drains so quickly.

—Catherine Kelley, Watertown, MA

tables with a pastry brush, making sure not to put it on too thick or the tomato flavor will be too pronounced. I let this bake again until the bones and vegetables are very brown. Then I put it all in a stockpot, cover with water, and simmer as usual to make a stock. The browned tomato paste gives a very rich, deep flavor and color that I was never able to achieve before.

—Ellen Lin Todl, Ft. Atkinson, WI

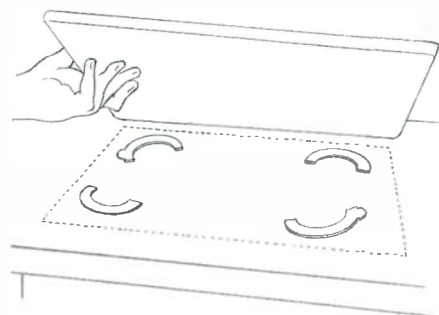
Dark, Flavorful Stock

I found it extremely difficult to produce a dark and tasty beef stock until I started using the following method.

I heat the oven to 400°F, put whatever beef bones and vegetables I'm using in a shallow pan, and bake them until the bones are very brown. Then I dilute a small (6-ounce) can of tomato paste with about 3 tablespoons of water, until the tomato paste is just thin enough to spread. I paint this solution over the top of all the bones and vege-

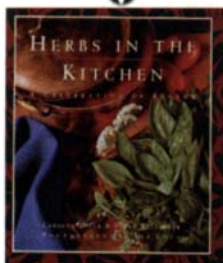
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—Robert Simmelink, Waukesha, WI

Save the Peel

After using a reamer to extract juice from a lemon, put the remaining lemon peel in the freezer. The zest grates easily when frozen. Also, the whole peel is good to put into the pot when boiling shrimp or other shellfish.

—Jane Clover, Muskegon, MI

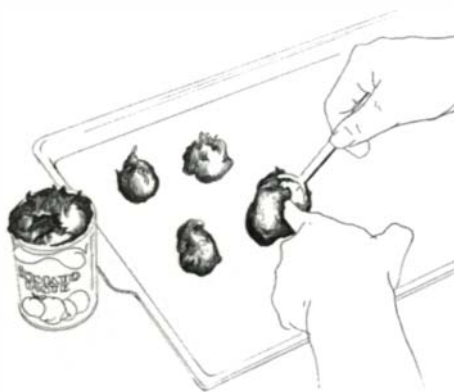
Stacking Plates without Scratching

Cabinet space being limited, I need to stack most of my dishes. I've found that by inserting inexpensive paper plates between the dishes, I've kept my dishes from getting scratched. The paper-plate dividers take up virtually no room and can be used many times.

—Carolyn Andrews, Centerville, OH

Premeasured Tomato Paste

A great method for saving leftover canned tomato paste is to scoop the paste out of the can with a measuring spoon and drop it by the tablespoon onto a baking sheet. Put the entire sheet into the freezer. When the paste is frozen, pop the dollops of tomato paste



into a resealable plastic bag and return to the freezer. When frozen in this manner, the chunks won't stick together—you can simply reach in and help your-

self to the measured tablespoons as you need them.

—Cathleen Trask, Santa Maria, CA

Dispensing Vanilla Drop by Drop

I like to smooth the flavor of hot chocolate by adding a few drops of vanilla extract. Dispensing just those few drops was a messy operation until I went to the drug-store and asked the pharmacist for an eye-dropper bottle. Now I have the perfect tool for dispensing the right amount of vanilla for my morning cup. An eye-dropper also works nicely for other flavorings or dyes that you use in small amounts.

—Peter M. Christensen, Aldergrove, BC

Removing Garlic Smell

To get the garlic smell off your hands, simply wet your hands and put them on your stainless-steel sink for a few seconds. It takes the smell right out.

—Diane Rathman, St. Louis Park, MN ♦

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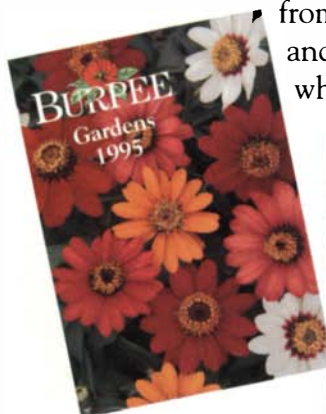
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Classic American Dinner Rolls

A trio of traditional shapes from a light and buttery yeast dough

BY RANDALL PRICE



Use a dough cutter to cut equal pieces. Here, the author cuts portioned dough into 36 pieces. He'll roll them into balls and then cluster these together to make cloverleaf rolls.

Cloverleaf rolls keep their shape in a muffin tin. Form the rolls by putting three balls of dough into each cup, and then let the rolls rise in the pan.



Breadmaking is one of the kitchen's miracles. Few other activities bring such satisfaction to the cook, or such pleasure to the guests. While current baking trends favor hearty, rustic breads, classic American dinner rolls can never go out of style. The warmth of a piping-hot, homemade dinner roll, topped with a cool slice of sweet butter, is a very special treat. And while specialty bakeries can sometimes create very high-quality breads, the only way you can savor soft, fresh dinner rolls is by taking the time to make them yourself. Fortunately, melt-in-your-mouth dinner rolls are easy to make from scratch. The rich dough is a delight to knead, and the forming of the basic shapes requires no special skills other than a degree of accuracy in rolling, cutting, and portioning.

ROLL DOUGH IS NOT BREAD DOUGH

I think a slightly sweet, rich, white-flour dough gives the best results. In my recipe, butter and egg yolk give richness, while whole milk and oil provide tenderness. You can use your favorite recipe for a rich dough; the shaping techniques will be the same. You don't need to work the dough as hard as you would bread dough because small rolls need less support from gluten, a protein that forms when flour comes in contact with water. Gluten develops during kneading and provides a yeast dough's "strength." This is why bread flour, which has strong gluten-forming properties, is unwelcome when making dinner rolls. All-purpose white flour gives the correct texture.

My basic recipe allows many variations. I like the nutty flavor gained by substituting a little whole-wheat flour for some of the white, and I often make these rolls using buttermilk, fresh herbs, citrus zest, a big pinch of freshly ground black pepper or another spice or—for special dinners—a few threads of steeped saffron. No matter which version you bake, timing is of great importance when serving dinner rolls. They're most fragrant and flavorful immediately after baking.

LET THE DOUGH RISE

A slow first rise gives the rolls a fine, soft crumb. If your kitchen is cool, a gas oven with a pilot light is an ideal place for the dough to rise. If you have an electric oven, let the dough rise on a rack above a shallow pan of very hot water.

If it's more convenient, you can refrigerate the dough overnight for the initial rise, and then shape it and bake it when it suits your schedule. A refrigerator rise can be extended for as long as four days because the cool air slows the yeast. Just use a bowl that provides plenty of room for the dough's growth, and keep an eye on the dough to make



sure it doesn't spill over as it expands. If the dough threatens to overflow, give it a poke to make it deflate. Also, be sure to grease the bowl with oil or vegetable spray rather than butter. Butter will harden and not keep the dough's surface moist. Allow the dough to begin its rise for about 20 minutes at room temperature before refrigerating. Before you shape the rolls, allow refrigerated dough to sit at room temperature for half an hour before you punch it down.

PUNCH THEN SHAPE

Despite its title, punching down dough is not a violent act. Gently deflate the risen dough by sliding both hands under the dough and bringing the sides over and into the center of the dough. Then invert the dough so the bottom faces up. Let

Turn layers of dough into fantan rolls. Roll out the dough, butter it, and cut it into six even strips. Stack the strips on top of one another, and then cut the layers into pieces (top photo). Arrange the dough in muffin tins, cut edges facing upward, so the layers fan out.

A chopstick makes the indentation for a Parker House roll. After the dough has been rolled out and cut into circles, make an indentation across the roll at about the one-third mark. Then brush a little butter down the roll's center and fold the smaller part of the roll over the larger.



the dough rest for five minutes before you shape it.

Precision in shaping rolls is important, but don't worry if the shapes aren't perfect; inaccuracies even out during rising and baking. A muffin tin is essential for containing the cloverleaf and fantan rolls' shapes and helping their layers bond. Parker House rolls should be placed, edges touching, in a pan (I use a 9x13-inch casserole dish).

To begin the second rising, cover the shaped rolls with plastic wrap. Then put the pan in a turned-off oven with a pan of hot water beneath the rolls' rack,

or in a gas oven with a pilot light. Take special care to avoid drafts during the second rising. The rolls should nearly double in volume in about 40 to 50 minutes.

Before I put my rolls in the oven, I like to brush them with an egg glaze (one egg yolk beaten with a pinch of sugar and a tablespoon of milk) to give them a deep, golden sheen. They also may be brushed with milk for a dark, shiny effect, or with melted butter for a soft and shiny crust. For an especially soft crust, brush the rolls again with butter as soon as they come out of the oven.

BASIC RICH WHITE DOUGH

This recipe makes a soft and buttery dough and is easily doubled. *Yields 12 dinner rolls.*

1 package dry yeast
¼ cup warm water (100° to 110°F)
¼ cup sugar
¾ cup milk
6 Tbs. butter
1 lb. (3½ cups) all-purpose flour
2 Tbs. vegetable oil
1 egg, lightly beaten
1 tsp. salt
3 Tbs. butter, melted (for shaping)

MAKING THE DOUGH

Sprinkle the yeast over the warm water. Add a pinch of the sugar. Stir and let the mixture sit until it's foamy, about 5 min. (If the mixture doesn't foam, the yeast may be inactive. Throw out the mixture and begin again with new yeast.)

Heat the milk and butter just until the butter melts. Let the mixture cool until it's tepid.

Measure the flour into a large bowl and make a well in the center. Pour in the tepid milk and the yeast mixture. Add the rest of the sugar and the oil, egg, and salt. Mix the ingredients thoroughly, gradually drawing in the flour to form a soft dough. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured work surface.

(For a variation, make whole-wheat rolls with orange and coriander. Orange zest makes these rolls particularly fragrant, and the whole-wheat flour gives the rolls a pleasantly hearty flavor. Use the recipe above, but substitute ½ cup of whole-wheat flour for ½ cup of the white flour. After the salt is added, add the grated zest of 1 orange and ½ tsp. ground coriander. Proceed with the remainder of the recipe as written.)

Knead the dough—Push the dough away from you with the heels of your hands, then fold the dough over itself and give it a quarter turn. Repeat this pushing, folding, and turning, adding only enough flour to keep the dough from sticking to the table, until the dough is smooth and elastic, about 5 min. The dough will be softer than ordinary bread dough. Put the dough in a greased bowl and then turn the dough over so the greased side faces up. Press plastic wrap onto the surface of the dough and leave it to rise until doubled in volume, 45 min. to 1 hour. Gently punch down the dough and then let it rest for 5 min. before shaping.

SHAPING THE ROLLS

Parker House rolls—Lightly butter a 9x13-in. pan. With a rolling pin, roll the dough on a lightly floured surface to a

thickness of about 1/2 in. Use a floured biscuit cutter or drinking glass to cut the dough into 2 1/2- to 3-in. rounds. Gather the dough scraps and gently press them together. Roll and cut the remaining dough.

Imagine each roll divided into thirds by two horizontal lines. Gently press a chopstick or the handle of a wooden spoon into one of these lines to make an indentation (see top photo at left)—don't press all the way through. Brush a little melted butter on the center of the roll, fold the smaller part over the larger, and press firmly with your finger to seal. Put the rolls, sides touching, in the pan. Allow to rise for 40 to 50 min., or until doubled in volume.

Cloverleaf rolls—Lightly butter a standard 12-portion muffin tin. With your hands, roll the dough into a long cylinder about 18 in. long. Use a dough cutter to divide this in half and then cut each half into six equal portions. Divide each of these 12 portions into three sections for a total of 36 pieces. Each piece should be approximately the same size.

With your palms, lightly roll each piece of dough into a smooth ball. Cluster three balls of dough in each cup of the muffin tin. Brush with a little melted butter. Allow to rise for 40 to 50 min., or until doubled in volume.

Fantans—Lightly butter a standard 12-portion muffin tin. With a rolling pin, roll the dough on a lightly floured surface into a 14x18-in. rectangle that's about 1/8 in. thick. Brush the surface of the rectangle with melted butter. Cut the rectangle in half lengthwise and then cut each half into

three long, equal strips. Stack the six layers and press together lightly (see top photo on p. 25). With a very sharp knife, cut the long strip in half and then cut each half into six equal sections. Put each section into a cup of the muffin tin, cut edges facing up. Brush with a little melted butter. Allow to rise for 40 to 50 min., or until doubled in volume.

BAKING THE ROLLS

Heat the oven to 375°F. Brush the rolls with egg glaze if desired (see recipe below) and bake for 12 to 15 min. The rolls will be evenly colored when done and should sound hollow when tapped on the bottom. Serve them at once.

EGG GLAZE

This glaze gives the rolls a golden sheen.

1 egg yolk
1 Tbs. milk
Pinch sugar

Beat all the ingredients together. Brush the glaze on the rolls just before baking.

Randall Price, from Middletown, Ohio, received the grand diplôme from La Varenne Cooking School in Paris in 1988. He was the chef to the American ambassador in Budapest for three years before returning to Paris, where he works as a private chef. ♦

Dinner rolls don't keep, so make them from scratch and serve them from the oven. This is the best way to appreciate their tender crumb and crunchycrust.



Photo: Dana Harris

Quick, Low-Fat Meal in a Bamboo Steamer

Each basket holds a custom-made dinner for one

BY ROSEMARY BURKHOLDER



From stove to table in minutes. Arrange seafood, fresh vegetables, and noodles in a steamer, cook briefly over boiling water, and serve with a spicy dipping sauce. The attractive bamboo basket becomes the dinner plate.

A meal that's beautiful to look at, contains a tasty mix of ingredients, cooks in only six minutes, leaves no messy pots or plates to clean up, and is low in fat, too. Sound too good to be true? It's not—it's a meal I make all the time in a bamboo steamer. I arrange enough fish, vegetables, and noodles for one person in each bamboo basket. I put the stacked baskets on top of a pot of boiling water and minutes later I'm carrying dinner to the table.

The food steams in a vapor bath that locks in the natural juices and nutrients and produces fish and vegetables that are extremely tender and moist. I serve a dipping sauce on the side to add a bit of spicy heat and tang which highlight the individual flavors in the meal (see recipes on p. 31). Cooking this way in a bamboo steamer is an especially nice way to make a meal for one or two people, though it works for more if you have enough baskets.

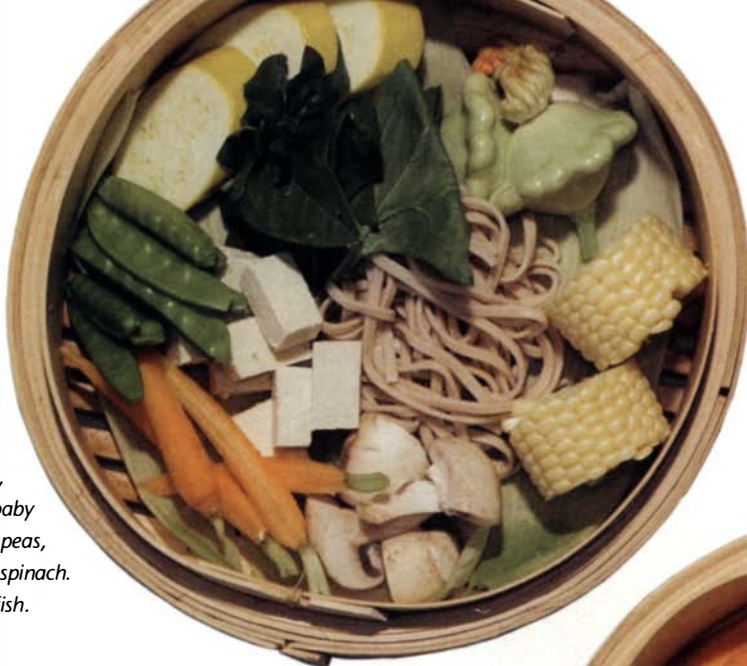
BAMBOO HOLDS THE FOOD, LETS STEAM PASS THROUGH

Although steamers made of metal work perfectly well, I'm partial to Chinese bamboo steamers because they're both practical and beautiful. Round trays with woven bamboo bottoms fit tightly, one stacked on top of the other. A woven bamboo lid that caps the top basket keeps steam in but doesn't allow water to condense and drip down on the food. The loosely woven bottoms permit steam to circulate up and around the food.

Bamboo steamers come in a variety of sizes, from 5 to 20 inches in diameter. I find 10 inches is a practical size because each basket easily holds enough food for one person and fits nicely over a stockpot. Two baskets with one lid cost around \$15 and are available in Asian markets, cookware shops, and import stores like Pier 1 (for mail-order suppliers, see sources on p. 30). Store the baskets on a shelf or hang them on a nail, where exposure to air and light will reduce their tendency to mildew. Besides, they'll look like pieces of art.

Photos: Suzanne Roman

Pick the season's best produce. In summer when fresh produce is abundant, load up on vegetables such as pattypan squash, corn, mushrooms, baby carrots, sugar-snap peas, yellow squash, and spinach. Here, tofu replaces fish.



To hold the boiling water that supplies the steam, you'll need a wok or pot that fits the steamer. I rest the bamboo steamer inside a wok. The edges of the baskets rest on the sides of the wok and keep the baskets above the water. You can also put the baskets on top of a large sauté pan or low stockpot that's slightly smaller in diameter than the baskets (see photos below).

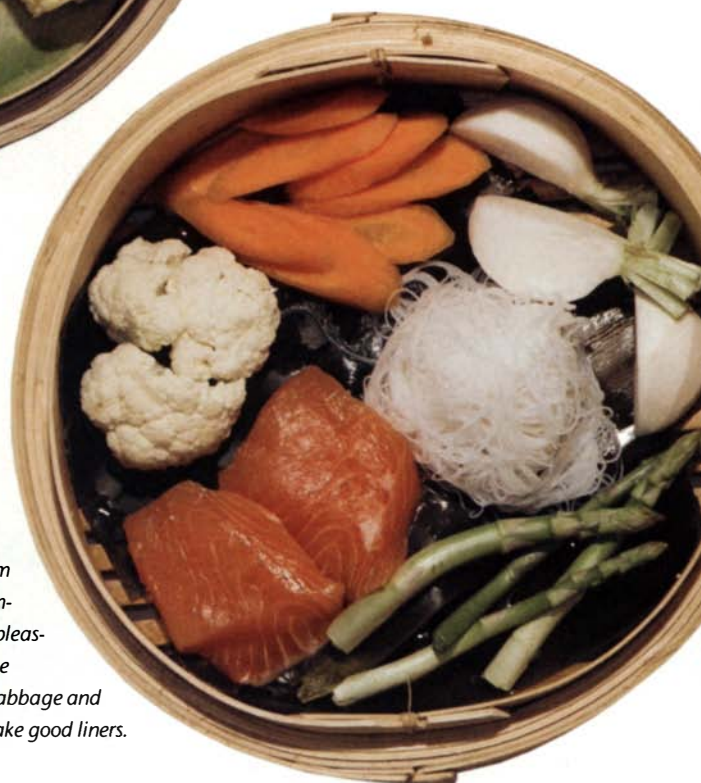
CHOOSE WHAT'S IN SEASON AND WHAT YOU LIKE

When choosing the ingredients for a steamed meal, ask yourself these questions: Will steaming enhance this particular ingredient or would it be better suited to another method of cooking? How long will it take to cook, and how can I cut it up so that it cooks in the same time as the other ingredients?

There's no better way to preserve the delicate taste and texture of fish than to gently cook it with steam. I find this cooking method works perfectly for firm-fleshed fish, such as halibut, salmon, or sole. A total of six to eight ounces of fish per person is an average-size serving. For the most flavor, texture, and color, I prefer to serve two ounces each of two different types of fish, and add some shellfish for even more variety. I like to throw in a few shrimp, scallops, mussels, or clams, or better yet a couple of each per person. When choosing mussels and clams, look for those with tightly closed shells. Of course you're not limited to fish for protein—boneless chicken breast and tofu work well too.

Choose the vegetables depending on the preferences of the people you're cooking for and on availability. My steamed baskets tend to change with the seasons. In fall and winter, broccoli, cauliflower, and root vegetables are abundant. In springtime, the baskets are laden with asparagus and snow peas, and during the summer months when vegetables are at their peak, my portions of fish are reduced to make room for the season's assortment of produce, like young, succulent squash, tender green or yellow

Seaweed liner imparts its own subtle flavor. A layer of seaweed keeps the food from sticking to the bamboo and makes a pleasing backdrop to the salmon. Chinese cabbage and corn husks also make good liners.



Steam cooks the contents of the bamboo baskets. Set the baskets either on a large pot of boiling water (above) or in a wok filled with a few inches of water (right).

MAIL-ORDER SOURCES FOR BAMBOO STEAMERS

Anzen Importers, 736 NE MLK Jr. Blvd.,
Portland, OR 97232; 503/233-5111.

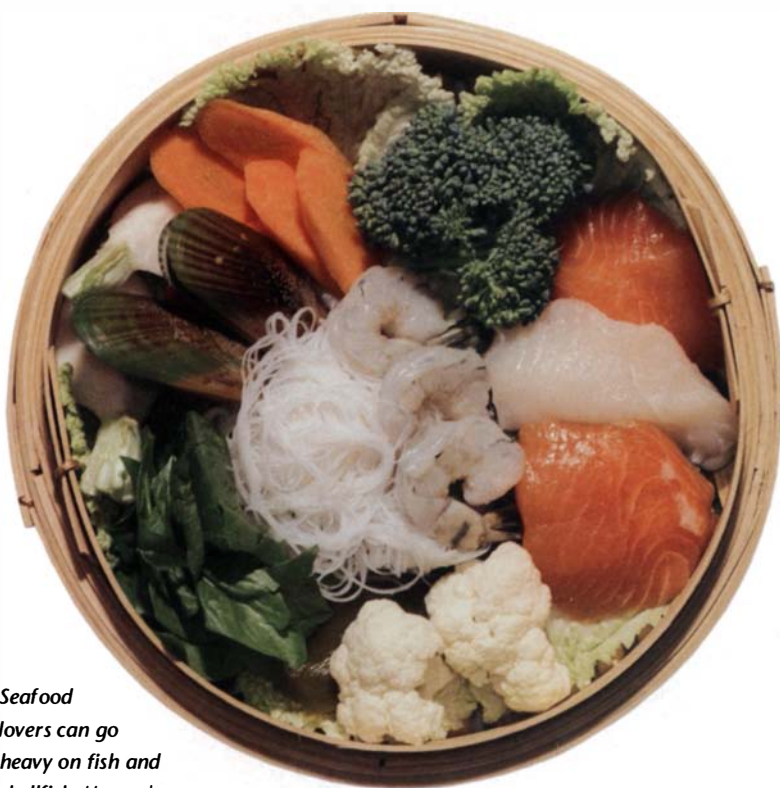
Colonial Garden Kitchens, PO Box 66,
Hanover, PA 17333-0066; 800/245-3399.

A Cook's Wares, 211 37th St., Beaver Falls,
PA 15010; 412/846-9490.

The Oriental Pantry, 423 Great Rd.,
Acton, MA 01720; 800/828-0368.



Cut the vegetables so that they all cook at the same rate. Hard, slower-cooking vegetables like these carrots need to be cut in thinner slices, while quick-cooking summer squash should be sliced thick so it doesn't overcook and turn mushy.



Seafood
lovers can go heavy on fish and shellfish. Here salmon, halibut, shrimp, and mussels are accompanied by rice noodles and winter vegetables.

beans, baby carrots, and even small rounds of sweet corn. I recommend using a variety of vegetables with different shapes and colors so when the lid is removed, it reveals a spectacular display.

Clean and prepare vegetables as you normally would for cooking, peeling and seeding as necessary. When you cut the vegetables, keep in mind that you want all the vegetables to cook in the same amount of time. Cut hard vegetables that take a long time to cook in smaller pieces or in thinner slices than you cut fast-cooking vegetables. For instance, cut carrots thinner than you cut summer squash (see photo above). You'll have another chance to control how fast they cook by the way you put them in the basket, but more on that later.

For the starch component of the meal, I like to put a mound of noodles in the center of the basket. Any noodle or pasta will work. I like to use Asian noodles, such as rice noodles, buckwheat soba noodles, and thick, white udon noodles. You can also use Italian-style pasta, either fresh or dry, or egg noodles.

The noodles don't get that long to cook when they're in the steamer basket, so they should be soft, pliable, and almost ready to eat before they go in. Read the package to see if the noodles should be soaked or boiled to soften them. I soak dried rice noodles in warm water for 30 minutes before putting them in the steamer. I cook wheat noodles in boiling water until their texture is *al dente* and then toss them in a little sesame oil to keep them from sticking together. Noodles aren't the only choice. A cup or so of leftover cooked rice, couscous, bulgur, or quinoa nicely rounds out the meal.

A dipping sauce served alongside the steamer basket adds a punch to the delicate flavors of the

steamed ingredients. The dipping sauce should have body and should lightly glaze the food that's dipped into it. The flavors can be mild or pungent, depending on what you're in the mood for. I offer three suggestions here (see recipes at right), but the possibilities are wide open.

ASSEMBLE WITH COOKING TIME AND BEAUTY IN MIND

Once you have selected, cleaned, and chopped your ingredients, it's time to assemble the basket. You can make each basket identical, or tailor the contents to suit the person you're serving. Begin by covering the bottom with a single layer of Chinese cabbage. This keeps food from sticking to the bamboo slats and prevents too much steam from hitting the bottom of the food and overcooking it. Lettuce, corn husks, seaweed, leek strips, and leafy greens such as collards and chard can be used instead. Each will add a subtle flavor of its own.

The items that take the longest to cook should have plenty of space around them so that they're blasted with steam. Quicker-cooking food, such as snow peas or shrimp, should be mounded up so they get less steam per item and don't overcook. I like to line the circumference of the basket with the longer-cooking vegetables, leaving the quicker-cooking vegetables, noodles, and seafood in the center.

STEADY STEAM COOKS QUICKLY

Fill the pot that the baskets will sit on with water and bring to a rapid boil. The water should reach one inch below the bottom of the steamer. Non-commercial ranges generally produce only enough heat to make steam for two, maybe three layers, so if you're steaming more than two baskets, I suggest you use a second pot of water.

When the water is boiling vigorously, put the covered stacked baskets on the pot. Steam can burn you badly—wear oven mitts and keep your face away from the steam. Turn down the heat, if necessary, to keep the water at a gentle boil because too much steam can toughen some of the more delicate ingredients.

The food should take between six and eight minutes to cook. Avoid unnecessary peeking—letting the steam out will slow down the cooking. Check after six minutes, lifting the lid slowly and away from you so you don't get burned. When done, the flesh of the fish and shellfish will lose its translucency and look moist and plump. The shells of mussels and clams will be slightly open and the edges of the flesh curled. The vegetables will range from crisp to tender, depending how they were cut and stacked. Make a mental note of how they came out so that you'll know to cut them smaller or bigger next time.

NO SERVING BOWLS NECESSARY

The beauty of using a bamboo steamer is that it can be carried to the table and the meal served directly from the basket. To keep the food hot, don't remove the lid until just before serving. Serve with one or two dipping sauces and enjoy the simplicity of this quick, low-fat, delicious meal.

SPICY SOY DIPPING SAUCE

Yields ¾ cup.

3 cloves garlic, minced
1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
2 Tbs. sesame oil
⅓ cup soy sauce
¼ cup red-wine vinegar
2 Tbs. dry sherry
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
¼ tsp. red pepper flakes
2 Tbs. sugar

Combine all the ingredients in a jar and shake well. This sauce keeps in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

SPICY SESAME PEANUT SAUCE

Yields 1⅓ cups.

⅓ cup smooth peanut butter
¼ cup rice vinegar
1 clove garlic, chopped coarse
½ Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh ginger
¼ cup water
2 Tbs. sugar (optional)
½ tsp. red pepper flakes
2 Tbs. soy sauce
¼ cup sesame oil
¼ cup peanut oil

Purée all the ingredients except the sesame oil and peanut oil in a food processor or blender until smooth. Through the feed tube or opening in the lid, slowly add the oils in a thin stream, mixing only until they are incorporated.

Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve at room temperature. This sauce keeps up to two weeks in the refrigerator.

TERIYAKI LEMON SAUCE

Yields 3 cups.

2 cups soy sauce
2 cups sugar
½ cup sake
2 cloves garlic, crushed
Zest of 2 lemons, plus juice of 1 lemon

In a large pot, combine the soy sauce, sugar, sake, and garlic. Bring to a boil and simmer for 15 min. Watch it carefully to make sure it doesn't boil over. Remove from heat and add the lemon zest and juice. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Use leftover sauce on grilled chicken or vegetables.

Rosemary Burkholder, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, is the chef at Rivers in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Not only does she borrow from the cuisines of the East, but she has reciprocated by teaching Western cooking techniques in China, at the invitation of the Ministry of Commerce. ♦



Elevating Egg Whites

Knowing when to stop whipping means airier meringues, lighter cakes, and taller soufflés

BY CAROLE WALTER

Whipped egg whites are major players in cooking and baking. They're the foundation for a wide variety of recipes, including crisp, melt-in-your mouth meringue cookies, delicate sponge cakes, and fluffy soufflés. Many cooks overbeat egg whites, believing that more is better, but this isn't so. In most instances, less is the way to go.

Many recipes, however, don't clearly explain that egg whites should be beaten to one of several degrees of stiffness, depending on how they're to be used. The key points to remember are whether or not the whites contain sugar and, if so, the amount of sugar used and when it is added to the whites. Each of these factors will influence the results.

WHY EGG WHITES RISE (AND FALL)

Beating egg whites causes the eggs' protein to form a mesh, which traps a network of air bubbles. As the whites are beaten further, the network stretches, more air bubbles are incorporated, and the volume multiplies as much as eight times. The more the whites are beaten, the stronger the network becomes—up to a point. If this structure is overworked, the air cells burst, releasing the water naturally present in the whites. The whites deflate and lose their shine, and the smooth texture separates into a curdled mass.

During baking, the air within the egg whites' cells expands, so the protein mesh must be stretchy enough to continue growing with the hot air. This rising network of protein, fueled by hot air, is the engine that makes soufflés rise above the rim.

CONTROL THE CONDITIONS

Several variables influence the successful whipping of egg whites, including the age of the eggs, the temperature of the eggs and equipment, the pace of beating, and the presence of other ingredients.

Some cooks say that aged whites whip better than fresh whites. Because older whites are thinner, they presumably whip more easily and to greater volume. However, according to Purdue University professor

Properly whipped egg whites will give rise to soufflés. Here, the author presents a perfect salmon soufflé—the result of careful whipping and folding.





Meringue is easy to make if you know just when to add the sugar. This meringue topping is fluffy and not a bit grainy because superfine and confectioners' sugar were added when the whites had reached the soft-peak stage.

making a meringue, it's important that the sugar dissolve; otherwise, the meringue will be gritty.

For soft meringues, I use a blend of two parts superfine sugar to one part confectioners' sugar. Confectioners' sugar dissolves very quickly and gives the meringue a smooth texture. It also contains a small amount of cornstarch, which helps to absorb moisture in the egg white and prevents the cooked meringue from "weeping." However, I don't recommend using confectioners' sugar by itself because alone it can't provide the support needed. When making hard meringues, either superfine sugar or a sugar syrup can be used. Regardless of the type of sugar, it should always be added slowly, one teaspoon to two tablespoons at a time, for the whites to maintain their volume.

William Stadelman, aged whites do whip to greater volume, but they aren't nearly as stable as fresh whites.

According to Howard Hillman, author of *Kitchen Science*, warm egg whites whip faster because they have a lower surface tension, and therefore the bubbles form with less resistance. Although eggs should be refrigerated until shortly before using and are most easily separated when cold, they should stand at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes. But eggs shouldn't be left at room temperature for more than two hours, because the risk of bacterial contamination greatly increases (see Basics, p. 72).

No matter what degree of stiffness you're trying to achieve with egg whites, always develop the cell structure slowly to foster a stable foam. Beating too quickly creates larger air cells which break quickly.

Fats inhibit the foaming process, so it's essential that not one drop of yolk be present in the white. Always be sure that the equipment you use is thoroughly clean and free of fat.

Adding an acid, such as cream of tartar, lemon juice, or white vinegar, helps bond the cells together, giving the whites stability and smoothness. Contrary to popular belief, acid does not contribute to volume. Salt, on the other hand, reduces foam stability and is best added elsewhere. Sugar is the ingredient that has the most important effect on whipped egg whites.

ADD SUGAR FOR STRENGTH AND STABILITY

When added to egg whites, sugar is absorbed into the water that's naturally present in the whites. The sugar ties up the water molecules and slows their evaporation. This retained moisture strengthens the walls of the air bubbles, giving the proteins time to coagulate and set. Even the smallest amount of sugar will allow beaten whites to stand for a few minutes without losing their volume. Stiffly beaten egg whites containing lots of sugar will keep in the refrigerator for a few days.

The type of sugar you add depends on how you'll use the whites. Granulated, superfine, and confectioners' sugar each have different grain sizes, which may have an effect on the finished product. When

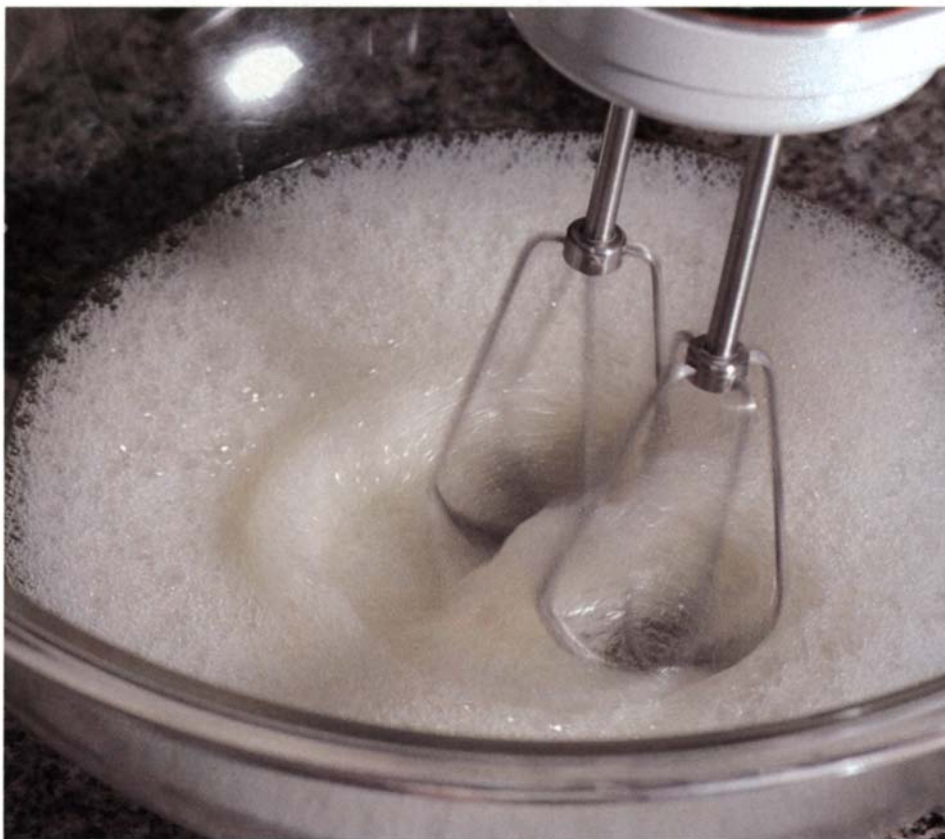
Look for four discrete stages when whipping egg whites.

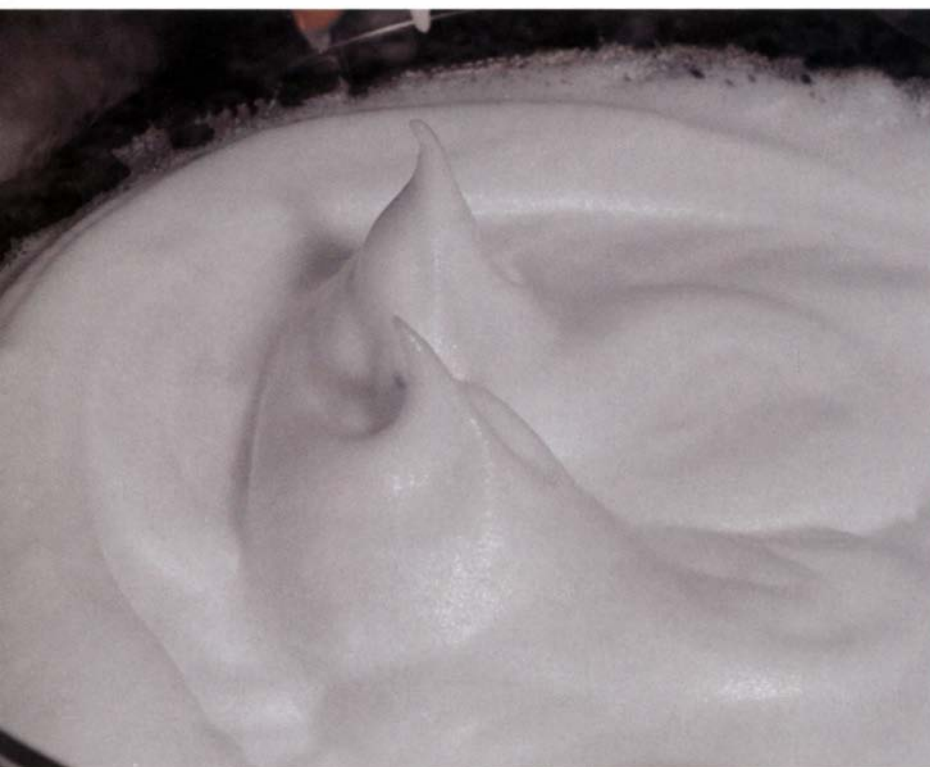
Stage 1. During this frothy stage, the egg whites become foamy and begin to form a cohesive mass. This is the time to add the cream of tartar.

THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

The mixing tool, along with the size, material, and temperature of the mixing bowl, all play a part in achieving stable whipped egg whites. Balloon whips, rotary egg beaters, and hand-held electric mixers will work for small amounts of egg whites. But when larger quantities are needed or a stiff meringue is called for, you'll want a stationary electric mixer, which offers more power. Although some food processors and blenders have special attachments for whipping, they don't aerate the whites sufficiently.

Copper bowls produce excellent whipped egg whites due to the positive reaction of this metal to the protein in the egg white. Adding an acid, such as





cream of tartar, lemon juice, or white vinegar, produces much the same result. I prefer stainless-steel bowls, but glass bowls work fine. Plastic and wooden bowls aren't suitable because they're porous and attract fat. Avoid using aluminum bowls and tools because any acid you add to the whites to increase stability will react with the aluminum and turn the egg whites gray.

Choose a bowl to accommodate the quantity of whites to be whipped, keeping in mind that egg whites expand up to eight times their original volume when whipped. For example, four large egg whites averaging one fluid ounce each can yield four cups of meringue. Never use cold bowls, as chilled egg whites will take longer to reach full volume. Rinsing a stainless-steel bowl in warm water before using it will hasten the whipping process, and wiping it with a bit of white vinegar will ensure a grease-free surface.

WATCH YOUR WHITES

I identify four discrete stages of beaten egg whites. Many cookbooks only recognize three stages—frothy, soft (or wet) peaks, and stiff (or dry) peaks. I believe it's easier to achieve the optimum consistency if an additional stage is identified between the soft- and stiff-peak stages. My third stage, when the whites pass from soft peaks to firm peaks (but before they're stiff), gives you another set of characteristics to watch for as the whites progress. Without experience, it can be difficult to recognize these stages, and while you're waiting for the egg whites to reach the desired point, you can easily go too far and overbeat them. Knowing where your whites are on the continuum will help you pre-

Stage 2. When the whites reach the soft-peak stage, ripples will have begun to form on the surface.

As the beater is lifted, the whites will droop slightly like the beak of a bird.

Stage 3. After only a few more seconds of beating, the whites will reach the firm-peak stage.

When the beater is lifted, the whites hold a firm shape. If sugar has been added, they become glossy, as shown here.

vent overbeating. For savory recipes, such as soufflés, the beating should stop at the soft-peak stage. I don't believe that whites can be whipped to stiff peaks without the addition of sugar. Plain whites whipped to stiff peaks won't have enough elasticity to expand during baking. For sweet dishes, you can add sugar at the firm-peak stage and safely continue whipping to the fourth stage, when the whites stand in stiff, shiny peaks.

When to add sugar. Adding sugar at the right stage is critical. By fortifying the whites, sugar can have a dramatic effect on the amount of air they can hold. The method that consistently gives me the best results involves adding sugar one stage in advance of the stage your recipe requires. For instance, if you need firm, glossy egg whites (my third stage), you'll get the best results by adding the sugar when the whites form soft peaks (second stage). If you add the sugar too early, the cell structure will become too strong and the air bubbles won't stretch to reach their full volume. However, if you add the sugar at the last minute, the whites won't reap the benefits of the sugar's strength.

Salvaging overbeaten whites. Alice Medrich, author of the award-winning book *Cocolat*, suggests adding an extra unbeaten white to salvage overbeaten egg whites. I have tried this remedy, and it does do the job, as long as no other ingredients (including sugar) have been added.

FOLDING IN BEATEN EGG WHITES

After getting your whites to the perfect consistency, you want to maintain all that volume, so good folding technique is required. Folding is always done by hand, usually with a rubber spatula. I prefer to use a jumbo one, as it covers twice the territory in half the time. Folding should be done as quickly and





with as few strokes as possible to prevent loss of air.

First, “lighten” the batter or soufflé base by folding in a quarter of the beaten egg whites. To begin folding, insert the spatula into the center of the batter and sweep the spatula underneath, then up the side of the bowl, across the top and down into the center of the batter again. Repeat the process, gradually turning the bowl until the two mixtures are combined. After the first quarter of the beaten whites has been incorporated and the batter lightened, you can easily add the rest of the whites in the same way. Never actually stir in the whites or the mixture will deflate.

LEMON MERINGUE PIE

Serves six to eight.

3 or 4 gingersnap cookies, crushed into fine crumbs
1 baked, 9-in. pie crust (see recipe at right)

FOR THE LEMON FILLING:

1½ cups sugar
6 Tbs. cornstarch
¼ tsp. salt
1½ cups cold water
4 large egg yolks, slightly beaten
2 Tbs. grated lemon zest
¼ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
2 Tbs. soft, unsalted butter

FOR THE MERINGUE TOPPING:

5 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. superfine sugar
2 Tbs. plus 2 tsp. confectioners’ sugar
4 large egg whites, room temperature
½ tsp. cream of tartar
½ tsp. vanilla extract

Sprinkle the cookie crumbs on the bottom of the pie crust and set aside. Heat the oven to 325°F. Combine the sugar, cornstarch, and salt in a heavy 2-qt. saucepan. Slowly add the water, whisking until smooth. Set over low heat. Stir the mixture until it comes to a slow boil; simmer 1 to 2 min.

Stir about ½ cup of the cooked sugar mixture into the egg yolks, pour the yolks back into saucepan, and blend well. Bring the mixture back to a slow boil over low heat, stirring gently. Cook for 1 min. Don’t overmix or the filling will be-

Stage 4. Don’t go this far without sugar. This stiff-peak stage is only for sweetened whites. Even with sugar, overbeating is a danger.

A few minutes in the oven transforms plain, white meringue into a stunning caramelized dessert.

come thin. Remove the pan from the heat, blend in the zest, lemon juice, and butter, and pour the filling into the pie crust.

To make the meringue, blend the sugars in a small bowl with a whisk. With an electric mixer, beat the whites on medium speed until frothy. Add the cream of tartar, increase speed to medium high, and beat until soft peaks form when the beaters are lifted (stage 2; see top photo at far left). Beat in the sugars about 2 tsp. at a time. Add the vanilla and continue to whip at medium-high speed until the whites are glossy and stand in firm peaks (stage 3; see bottom photo at far left).

With a spoon, drop mounds of meringue in a ring around the edge of the pie and then fill in the center. Cover the pie completely, sealing in the filling. To form peaks, swirl the meringue with the back of a tablespoon. Bake until the meringue is lightly browned, about 20 min. Cool completely.

FLAKY PIE PASTRY

Yields two 9-inch pie crusts.

11½ oz. (2⅓ cups) unsifted all-purpose flour
¾ tsp. salt
½ tsp. baking powder
½ cup (8 Tbs.) partially frozen unsalted butter, cut into ½-in. cubes
½ cup (8 Tbs.) partially frozen vegetable shortening, cut into small pieces
¼ cup ice water (use ⅓ cup if you use unbleached flour)

In the work bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade, put the flour, salt, and baking powder, and then put the bowl in the freezer for ½ hour. Pulse for 3 seconds to blend. Add half of the butter and half of the shortening and



toss to coat with flour. Pulse four or five times. Add the remaining fats and pulse again. The mixture should have the texture of meal with some larger pieces of fat.

Start the processor and immediately pour in the water. Stop the machine as soon as the water is added. Don’t allow the dough to form a mass. Dump the dough onto a work surface. With floured hands, shape the dough into two flat disks. All the crumbs should adhere to the dough; if they don’t, add a few drops of ice water. Dust the disks generously with flour, wrap them in plastic, and chill for an hour or more. The dough will keep for three days in the refrigerator or for six months in the freezer. (To defrost, leave in the refrigerator overnight.)

Rolling and baking—Heat the oven to 425°. Butter a pie plate liberally with soft butter. On a well-floured pastry cloth, roll the pastry into a round 2 in. larger than the top of the pie plate. Fit the rolled pastry loosely into the pie plate, being careful not to stretch the dough. Trim the overhang to 1 in. and fold this under to form a wall. Flute the edge of the pastry by pinching it between thumb and forefinger, keeping it

close to the edge of the plate to help prevent shrinkage during baking. Prick it lightly with a fork. Chill for 15 min.

On a square of heavy-duty foil larger than the pie plate, make a large buttered round about the size of the pie plate on one side of the foil. Using your hands, press the buttered foil into the pastry so that the foil completely lines the shell. Fill the foil-lined plate with dried beans or baking weights.

Bake until the sides start to brown, 10 to 12 min. Gently remove the foil with the beans. If the crust is to be used partially baked, leave it on a rack to cool. If not, return it to the oven and reduce the heat to 375°. Bake for 5 min., or until the bottom and sides are golden brown. If the pastry rises in the center, gently tap the surface with a fork. When done, cool on a rack before filling.

SALMON SOUFFLE

Serves six.

4 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 Tbs. grated Parmesan
2 Tbs. minced shallots
¼ cup flour
1¼ cups hot milk
2 tsp. tomato paste
2 tsp. Dijon mustard
1 Tbs. lemon juice
4 large egg yolks
½ cup grated sharp cheddar cheese
1½ to 2 cups cooked, flaked salmon
(about 1 lb. before cooking)
1 tsp. salt
Tabasco sauce
1 Tbs. chopped parsley
7 large egg whites
½ tsp. cream of tartar



Learn to master the folding technique.

Lighten the base with a quarter of the whites (left) and then gently add the rest. The reward for performing this delicate procedure will be a high rise during baking.



Put a baking sheet on rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 400°. Butter a 1½- to 2-qt. soufflé dish with 1 Tbs. of the butter. Sprinkle the bottom and sides with the Parmesan and refrigerate the dish.

Melt the remaining butter in a 3-qt. saucepan over low heat. Add the shallots and sauté lightly. Whisk in the flour and cook slowly for about 2 to 3 min., stirring constantly. Gradually whisk in the hot milk, ¼ cup at a time, mixing until smooth. Bring the mixture to a slow boil and whisk in the tomato paste, mustard, and lemon juice. Simmer for 3 min.

Put the egg yolks in a small bowl, add about a quarter of the hot liquid and whisk until smooth. Add this mixture to the saucepan. Bring the mixture back to a slow boil, stirring, and simmer for 1 min. Remove the pan from the heat and blend in the cheddar, mixing until smooth. Fold in the salmon, salt, a few drops of Tabasco, and the parsley. Make sure that the soufflé base is well seasoned to allow for the added egg whites. Let the mixture cool.

Whip the egg whites on medium-low speed until frothy. Increase the speed to medium and add the cream of tartar. Gradually increase the speed to medium high until the whites reach soft peaks (stage 2; see top photo on p. 34).

Fold a quarter of the whipped whites into the salmon to lighten the mixture. Then quickly fold in the rest of the whites. Empty the mixture into the soufflé dish.

To form the "top hat" of the soufflé, insert a spatula into the batter 1 in. from the edge. Move the spatula up and down as you turn the dish, so that you have made a complete ring around the inside of the dish.

Put the soufflé in the oven on the heated baking sheet (this helps bake the bottom) and reduce the oven temperature to 375°. Bake the soufflé until golden brown, 35 to 40 min. The top should wobble slightly. Serve immediately.

*Carole Walter is the author of the award-winning cookbook *Great Cakes* and a forthcoming book on pies and tarts. She is a certified culinary professional and teaches in the New York metropolitan area, where she is also a commercial baking consultant. ♦*

Understanding Foie Gras

Temperature is key to cooking this delicate and luxurious ingredient

BY WAYNE NISH

Most people have heard of fresh foie gras, but not many people have tasted it, let alone cooked with it. Foie gras is full of romance and the promise of sensual pleasure, but it's also pretty intimidating. Not everyone knows exactly what it is, it's very expensive, and it has a reputation for being tricky to prepare. I got to know—and love—foie gras when I worked as the hot appetizer chef at the Quilted Giraffe in New York City. I must have prepared three pounds of fresh foie gras every day over the course of a year, so I became very familiar with its temperamental ways. Actually, it isn't difficult to work with as long as you understand a few simple principles. Once you taste a crisply sautéed slice, with its deep, rich, powerful flavor and startlingly silky texture, you'll know that fresh foie gras is something worth learning about and trying yourself.

WHAT IS FOIE GRAS?

Foie gras (pronounced FWAH GRAH), which means “fat liver” in French, is the liver from ducks or geese that have been specially fed to produce large, rich livers. This fattening process, called gavage (gah-VAHZH), takes place for a couple of weeks before slaughter. The process involves feeding the birds a rich, corn-based diet using electronic pumps. Gavage has been criticized as being unnatural and unpleasant for the animals, but producers point out that ducks and geese don't chew their food before swallowing, so the pump-feeding doesn't provoke a gag or other disturbing reflex in the bird.

Foie gras is a very rich and potent ingredient, and therefore should be served in small portions, almost always as an appetizer or as a garnish to a dish rather than as a main course. There are lots of ways to prepare foie gras—sautéed, poached, baked, or made into pâté or a mousse—but the two standard methods for fresh foie gras are sautéing slices to be served hot and baking whole livers in a terrine to serve cold.

Foie gras is produced in many parts of the world, notably in the Gascony, Périgord, and Alsace regions of France, and in eastern Europe. There was no pro-



duction the United States until the early 1980s, when the demand became strong enough to make commercial operations feasible here. Still, there are only two commercial producers in the U.S., one in the Hudson Valley of New York and the other in California's Sonoma Valley.

Duck, duck, goose. In the U.S., only ducks are raised for foie gras, not geese. According to Ariane Daguin of D'Artagnan, a leading distributor of fresh duck foie gras, geese are more susceptible to disease and are more temperamental than ducks. They must be fed more frequently and for a longer period of time, and they demand the comfort of the same “goose girl” to aid in their daily feeding.

Nonetheless, geese are still raised for their livers in Europe. Foie gras d'oie (FWAH GRAH DWAH) is an even richer product than duck liver (foie gras de canard). This higher fat content makes goose liver less suitable for sautéing because the high heat causes more

Fresh foie gras is the ultimate in rich ingredients, so pair it with a sharp partner for balance and complexity. Here, crisp sautéed slices are served with apples, fresh pea shoots, and a gingery, spicy mango sauce.



Muscovy ducks step up to the feed pump.

To produce the enlarged foie gras livers, the birds are fed a rich, copious diet for a few weeks before slaughter.

SOURCES FOR FRESH FOIE GRAS

D'Artagnan, Inc.,
399-419 St. Paul Ave.,
Jersey City, NJ 07306;
800/DARTAGN or
201/792-0748.

Hudson Valley Foie Gras and Duck Products, RR#1
Box 69, Ferndale,
NY 12734; 914/292-2500 (can steer you to local distributors).

Sonoma Foie Gras,
Guillermo Gonzalez &
Assoc., PO Box 2007,
Sonoma, CA 95476;
800/427-4559 (in
California) or
707/938-1229.

fat to melt. Conversely, the lower heat used in terrine production makes goose liver suitable and economical for this cooking method.

RECOGNIZING QUALITY

Here in the U.S., there is little romance to the purchase of foie gras. There are no colorful market stalls of vendors who have personally raised their animals. The cook who wants to prepare foie gras at home can contact a mail-order distributor who sends the liver by overnight courier (see sources at left).

The USDA requires that fresh foie gras sold in this country be classified by size and quality. The higher the grade, the fewer blemishes the liver will have and the larger it will be. Grade-A livers must weigh at least one pound, Bs are between eight and fifteen ounces, and Cs are under a half-pound. The size of the liver will determine how “veiny” it will be. The basic vein network is the same in all the livers, so bigger specimens have relatively more “meat.” You want a liver with few veins because if they’re not removed adequately they can mar the smooth texture of the finished dish. Also, bits of blood from the veins will discolor the foie gras when it’s cooked in terrine form.

Foie gras is a fresh product that is highly perishable, and it has a very high fat content. It must be kept at a constant temperature of 38° to 40°F during its handling, packing, and distribution to keep it wholesome and fresh. In fact, the ducks themselves are chilled before the livers are removed so that the livers stay cold and firm and keep their natural shape.

Judging texture. To the novice, a brick-hard grade-A liver would seem to be the most desirable. In fact, however, its firmness means it has an extremely high fat content, which will result in more fat melting

off during cooking. With a high-fat liver, you can wind up with a small piece of sautéed liver or a smaller baked terrine. A grade-A liver with a bit of give, but not sponginess, is the most desirable. A very spongy liver will have a low fat content and will burn when sautéed. I found that out the hard way in my earlier days at the Quilted Giraffe. When I first handled one of these spongy livers I thought it felt a little different, but I decided to go ahead and cook it. The second I put a slice in the sauté pan, I knew that it was going to burn, so I quickly threw in a knob of butter, which saved the day. If you do get a liver that feels spongy and bounces back when you press it and you have time to return it, contact the supplier, who should willingly replace it with a better one. If you don’t have time, or you don’t realize that you have a spongy liver, just remember the butter trick.

HANDLING BEFORE COOKING

The only real preparation that fresh foie gras needs before cooking is some careful deveining. Some cooks like to let the livers come to room temperature before deveining. This softens them and makes it slightly easier to pull the veins from the livers. I prefer to devein the livers when they’re cold. First of all, as with any meat, the warmer foie gras gets, the more susceptible it becomes to bacteria. Also, as the liver softens, it becomes very fragile and is more liable to break apart. It’s difficult to get nice slices from a broken liver, and for terrines, more fat will be rendered off during baking. For sautéing, I don’t think a lot of deveining is needed, other than removing the obvious pieces from the surface of the liver. The sautéed slices will be golden brown so you won’t see any discoloration from blood. For terrines, however, a little more extensive deveining is required. You’ll get the most vein with the least disintegration of the liver if you know the way the veins run. See the diagram opposite for details.

To devein. Unwrap with liver and blot it with a paper towel. The liver should be a pale beige; trim off any yellow or green spots. Each liver consists of two lobes, one slightly larger than the other. If there are a few bits of thin, white membrane clinging to the outside, pull them off. Gently pull apart the lobes with your hands, noting that they are connected by a vein through the center of the two lobes. Cut this vein with a knife. Hold one lobe firmly in your hand and with a pair of flat-end tweezers, grasp the end of the vein that was severed. Gently pull with a slow, even motion. In the best case, the gentle pull will cause the rest of that portion of vein hidden inside the liver to pull free. For more extensive deveining, gently probe with the tweezers, a paring knife, or your fingers to find and remove the network of veins (see diagram opposite). Sometimes a clump of white fat is nestled between the two lobes, attached to a very

thin membrane, which should be peeled off with your fingers. Keep the deveined livers cold until you're ready to cook them.

DELICIOUS EITHER HOT OR COLD

The trend in restaurant cooking these days is to offer sautéed slices of fresh foie gras rather than the more traditional foie gras terrine. Until the early 1980s, only canned terrines were available in the U.S. due to import restrictions, so people tend to associate even freshly made terrines with the old-style canned versions. Also, sauté recipes generally require far less preparation and labor to make, so they're preferred by restaurant chefs.

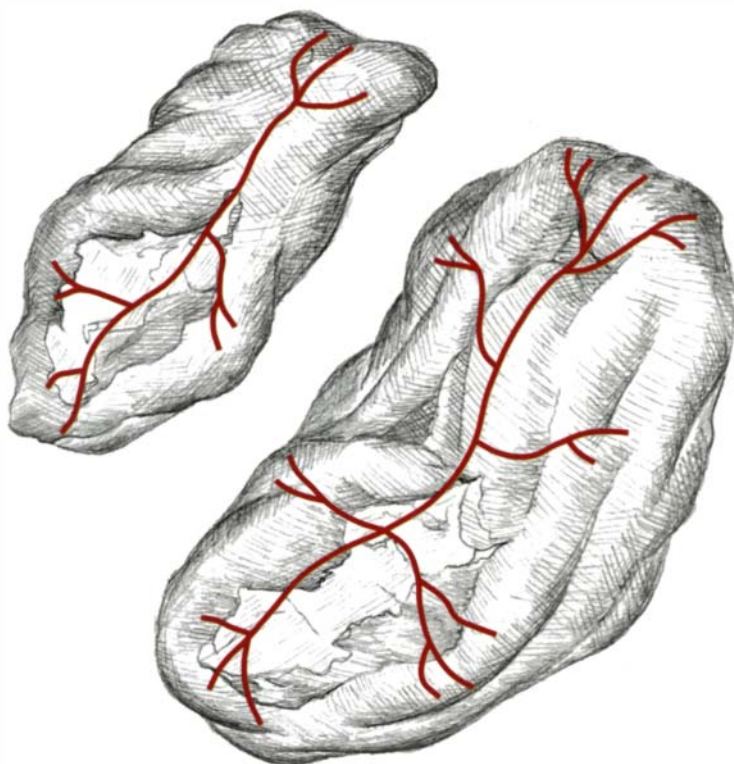
Quick, high heat for sautéing. Sautéing foie gras is by far the most simple way to prepare it. Nonetheless, while the cooking is accomplished in a matter of minutes, you must use your sense of touch to identify the precise moment when the liver is fully cooked but not overcooked. As foie gras cooks, a lot of fat is rendered off so the slices go from cold, firm slices that are full of solidified fat to softer, springier slices that have had much of the fat cooked off. As you cut your



This grade-A duck liver has a good, clear color and a desirable texture—firm but slightly supple, with no trace of sponginess. The author carefully pries apart the two lobes in preparation for deveining and slicing.



A hot, thin knife and careful measuring yield neat slices and no waste. The author cuts the liver fairly thick because it shrinks during cooking. It's important to work quickly to keep the liver cool and unmelted.



Deveining takes patience and nimble fingers. The sketch shows approximately where the veins run. Use the tip of a paring knife and your fingers to slit and gently pry open the liver to reveal the veins so you can pull them out.

slices for sautéing, touch them to gauge the texture when cold. During cooking, feel them again so you can monitor the transformation. Knowing exactly when foie gras is done to perfection is an acquired skill, so the best thing to do is to cook a lot of it!

When you sauté foie gras, you want to use very high heat so that the outside is quickly seared, which forms a delicious crisp surface and helps to keep the slice from completely melting away. I heat my black iron sauté pan until it's very hot. The slices cook quickly and should be served right away, so be prepared with your plates and other ingredients.

Long, slow cooking for terrines. While terrines may be currently less fashionable in American restaurants, they are a wonderful way to experience the sublime flavor and texture of fresh foie gras. Making a terrine yourself is a lot less expensive than buying one from a gourmet store, too. Another advantage for the home cook is that terrines can be made up to a week ahead of serving. In fact, they need at least two days "curing" time after baking in order for the flavors to develop. Probably the most important thing to remember when making a terrine is to be gentle—handle the liver gently, use gentle heat and a water bath for cooking, give the terrine enough time to rest and cure, and take care when slicing the finished terrine.

Strategies for gentle cooking. The best pan to use is a heavy, enameled-iron terrine mold. Oven-proof ceramic or porcelain works too, but the heav-

Testing by touch for doneness. As the slice of firm, cold liver cooks, it renders fat and becomes softer. Notice how hot the pan is, a crucial factor for getting a good crust that tastes great and keeps too much fat from cooking off.



For gentle cooking, the terrine is bundled in foil and bathed in hot water before baking. While sautéed foie gras needs high heat, terrines need the low, even heat provided by a water bath. It's easy to test the internal temperature of the foie gras by piercing the foil with an instant-read thermometer.



After cooking, the terrine needs a weight and a wait. The gentle pressure from about five pounds of jars compresses the lobes of foie gras for neater slices. A two-day wait wrapped in plastic in the refrigerator improves the flavor and texture.



ier the mold the better so that the heat is distributed slowly and evenly. The terrine mold should be carefully wrapped in foil and placed in a bain-marie (a water bath), which can just be a roasting pan filled with boiling water. The actual cooking time will vary depending on the size of your foie gras and on the shape of your terrine, but I recommend setting your oven to 325°, which should keep the water in the bain-marie at about 160°. The most important temperature to gauge is the internal temperature of the liver. You can check this during cooking by inserting an instant-read thermometer into the center of the terrine. Don't push it in so far that the tip gets close to the bottom or sides of the mold or your reading will be too high—you want to know the temperature at the heart of the livers. One hundred ten degrees produces a rosy pink terrine, which is the way I like it because the texture is very creamy and silky. Cooking it rare like I do is one more reason to be sure to keep it cool during handling.

My terrine recipe is very basic, just some flavoring from a sweet-wine marinade and salt and pepper. It's very important to season a terrine enough before cooking. Once it's cooked, it's difficult to add salt and pepper. The seasonings really need to be impregnated in the liver. I like to dissolve the salt in the wine so that I can actually taste the saltiness before I marinate the liver, and so that the salt penetrates the liver more evenly than if I just sprinkled it on. If you unintentionally undersalt a terrine, the best remedy is to serve it with a salty-savory relish, like an onion and cranberry compote, which will help balance the flavors.

SAUTEED FOIE GRAS WITH CARMELIZED APPLES & MANGO SAUCE

Serve this appetizer with a semisweet wine that has rich, deep fruit to enhance the mango and apple and to balance the richness of the foie gras—a *vendange tardive* (late-harvest) Alsatian Riesling or a Coteaux du Layon Chaume from the Loire. *Serves eight.*

FOR THE MANGO SAUCE:

2 Tbs. olive oil
2 shallots, peeled and sliced
1-in. piece unpeeled ginger, sliced thin
1 small chile pepper, split and seeded
Salt
1½ cups mango purée (made from fresh, ripe mangoes, peeled, cut into chunks, and puréed)
Few drops lime juice
Few drops sake (optional)
Freshly ground black pepper

1 grade-A fresh duck foie gras, about 1½ lb.
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 Tbs. butter
1 tsp. sugar
1 tsp. salt
2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and cut into 12 wedges each
4 cups mixed fresh greens (watercress, arugula, pea shoots, or a mesclun mix), plus a few more for decoration
1 Tbs. water or white vermouth

For the sauce—In a small saucepan, heat the olive oil and add the shallots, ginger, chile pepper, and a pinch of salt. Cook over low heat until the shallots are soft but not brown, about 3 min. Add the mango purée and heat briefly. Remove from the heat, leave to infuse for about 1 hour, and then pass through a fine strainer. Season with lime juice, *sake*, and salt and pepper to taste. Reserve at room temperature.

To cook the foie gras—Blot the foie gras dry, separate the lobes, and devein (see discussion, pp. 38–39). Using a long, thin, slicing knife, cut each lobe into $\frac{5}{8}$ -in. slices, rinsing the blade with hot water between each slice. Use smooth pulling strokes to slice; do not saw back and forth. Keep the slices cold until you're ready to cook them.

Heat two 10-in. sauté pans over medium-high heat. Season the foie gras slices with salt and pepper. When the pans are hot, add the foie gras, pressing firmly on each piece so it makes good contact with the hot pan. Sauté the first side until brown, about 1 min., turn, and continue cooking until the pieces are soft when pressed. During cooking, pour off the excess fat and reserve for cooking the apples. When done, transfer the foie gras slices to paper towels to drain. Keep warm.

To cook the apples—Pour off any remaining fat in one of the pans and let it cool slightly. Add the butter, let it melt, then sprinkle in the sugar and salt. Put the apple slices in the pan and turn them to coat in the seasonings. Cook over medium heat until lightly browned, pouring over them about 1 Tbs. of the reserved foie gras fat for flavor. When done, transfer the apples to paper towels to drain. Keep warm.

To wilt the greens and assemble the dish—Pour off any remaining fat from the pan and wipe with a paper towel. Add the greens to the pan along with the water or vermouth. Toss for a few seconds until slightly wilted and remove immediately. Divide the wilted greens among eight appetizer plates. Arrange three slices of apple next to the greens, place two slices of foie gras on top of the greens, and spoon some mango sauce across the front of the plate. Decorate with a few fresh greens, if you like (see photo on p. 37). Serve immediately.

FOIE GRAS TERRINE

Pour a glass of a lighter-style French Sauternes or an Auslese Riesling from the Mosel to serve with the terrine. Makes one terrine.

2 grade-A fresh duck foies gras, about 3 lb. total
1½ cups sweet white dessert wine, such as Muscat de Beaumes de Venise or a late-harvest Riesling
2 Tbs. kosher salt

HONEY-THYME VINAIGRETTE:

1 Tbs. honey
1 tsp. coarsely cracked black peppercorns
Salt to taste
½ tsp. fresh thyme leaves
¼ cup champagne vinegar
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Mixed tender salad greens
Fresh figs, quartered
Grilled bread

To make the terrine—Blot the livers dry, separate the lobes, and devein (see discussion, pp. 38–39). Pour the wine into a large bowl, add the salt, and stir to dissolve. Add the livers and marinate at room temperature for 1 hour or in the refrigerator for 3 hours, turning often.

Heat the oven to 325°F. Cut a piece of heavy cardboard



to fit the inside top of a heavy terrine (a 10-in. rectangular one works well) and wrap it in foil. Arrange the livers in the terrine in the following pattern: one large and one small lobe on the bottom layer, with their curved outsides down; one small and one large lobe on the top layer with their curved outsides up. Basically, you're restoring the livers to their original shape. Press firmly to fit them snugly into the terrine. Pour over some of the remaining wine to fill the mold. Wrap the terrine in several layers of foil, place in a larger pan, and add boiling water to come halfway up the side of the terrine.

Put the terrine and water bath in the heated oven and cook until the internal temperature of the livers is about 110°; this can range from 35 min. to 1½ hours. Remove from the oven and allow to cool about 15 min. Unwrap the terrine, put the foil-wrapped cardboard on top, and then rewrap the terrine in plastic wrap. Arrange a couple of cans or other objects that weigh about 5 lb. on top and then refrigerate for two days.

To make the vinaigrette—Whisk together the honey, pepper, salt, thyme, and vinegar until the honey is dissolved. Whisk in the oil drop by drop until the sauce is slightly thick and emulsified. Taste and adjust seasoning.

To slice the terrine—Remove the weights, peel off any solid fat, and run a sharp knife around the edge of the terrine. Invert it onto a board or platter and let the terrine fall out. Cut ¼- to ½-in. slices with a thin knife dipped in hot water.

To serve—Toss the greens with a few spoonfuls of the vinaigrette to coat lightly. Do the same with the figs. Arrange a slice of foie gras, a cluster of greens, a pile of figs, and two pieces of toast on each plate. Serve immediately. The leftover terrine will keep, well wrapped, up to a week.

A slice of foie gras terrine is rich and satiny smooth with a hint of sweetness from its muscat wine marinade. Spread it on crusty grilled bread, to eat with figs and greens dressed in a sweet-tart vinaigrette.

Wayne Nish changed careers in his early thirties and went to cooking school. He landed a job at the renowned Quilted Giraffe in New York and soon after became the executive chef at La Colombe d'Or. He is now the co-owner, with partner Joe Scalice, of two Manhattan restaurants, March and La Colombe d'Or. ♦

Royal Afghan Dinner

Rice is king in this meal of savory vegetables, aromatic spices, and fork-tender lamb

BY ALI SERAJ

MENU

Qabuli Palau
(Rice with
lamb, carrots,
and raisins)



Banjan Borani
(Eggplant with
tomato and
yogurt)



**Saland-E-
Kachaloo**
(Potato stew)



Salata
(Afghan salad)

When I was growing up in Afghanistan, dinner was the most important meal of the day. This was the time when the immediate family, and very often other family members, would gather at my parents' house. Since my grandfather, His Majesty King Habibullah, had 38 wives and 58 children, there was never a shortage of relatives dropping in for dinner.

The main and most important dish was always rice. Cooked in many different ways with a variety of meats, vegetables, and spices, rice was considered the king of the table. To this day, my favorite version is *qabuli palau*. Filled with tender chunks of lamb and flavored with onions and seven spices, it's the most aromatic of all the rice dishes. It's served with two complementary vegetable stews and a crisp salad. The four dishes together make a hearty, satisfying winter meal.

To develop their full flavor and to get the texture of the rice just right, these dishes can't be hurried. None of the steps, however, is difficult or time-consuming. You'll be surprised how easily this meal comes together.

INTRIGUING LAYERS OF FLAVOR

Filled with lamb, or sometimes chicken, *qabuli palau* could be a meal on its own. But in Afghan cooking, we like to layer flavors over flavors: some contrasting, some complementary. The rice is flavored with an aromatic combination of spices (see photo on p. 44), some of which are used in desserts in the West—cloves, cinnamon, and cardamom. Combined with a garnish of carrots and fruity raisins, the rice has an almost sweet taste to it, though it's really not sweet at all.

The stew we always serve with *qabuli palau*, and never on its own, is *banjan borani*, an eggplant and





Hearty meal fit for a king and plenty of company. Spread a banquet with lamb and rice qabuli palau (left), yogurt- and mint-topped eggplant (above, far left), coriander-studded potato stew (below right), and a refreshing Afghan salad (below, far left).



mix and the potatoes are flavorful but neutral tasting. If you were to serve the potatoes with white rice, which I do on occasion, the potatoes would taste much spicier than they do with the *palau*.

The *salata* is an Afghan salad that serves as a referee between the dishes. Chopped tomatoes, onions, cilantro, and sometimes cucumbers are doused with lemon juice to make a tangy, crunchy salad that awakens the taste buds and goes well with all the dishes on the plate.

RICE IS THE CENTERPIECE

I'll always remember the first time I cooked rice in the United States. Not familiar with local ingredients, I returned home from the grocery store with two boxes of Minute Rice. I followed the instructions on the box carefully in an attempt to prepare the family's famous *qabuli palau*. What resulted—a pale and sticky glob—must have made my grandfather turn in his grave. I had committed the greatest dishonor to this king of Afghan foods.

Unsure of what had gone wrong, I called my mother in Germany for advice. She told me that the rice most similar to Afghan rice is basmati, an aromatic, long-grain rice from India. When it cooks, the grains expand in length almost twice their original size and remain separate, unlike shorter-grain rices, which become quite clumpy. I found an Indian market that carried basmati, and I have never repeated my mistake. If you can't find basmati, I suggest you

tomato stew garnished with yogurt and mint (see top photo at left). The spices and raisins in the rice bring out the tartness of the yogurt and tanginess of the thick tomato sauce. If you tried the eggplant stew with plain rice it would taste almost bland. With the highly spiced rice, the eggplant tastes full of flavor.

The second stew that goes so well with *qabuli palau* is *saland-e-kachaloo*, a potato stew flavored with crushed coriander seeds and fresh coriander leaves (cilantro). When served with the *palau*, the spices

use Carolina long-grain rice. It will stick together more than basmati, but it still gives acceptable results.

Soaking and parboiling keeps the grains separate. In Afghanistan, we say that after it is cooked, each grain of rice should stand out by itself and have a smile on its face. Starting with the right rice is important for ending up with long, separate grains, but how you handle the rice is also important. I wash the rice thoroughly to rid it of any surface starch (see photo below). Then I let it soak in warm water for an hour or two. The longer the rice soaks, the longer the grains expand during cooking, and I think longer grains look and taste better.

Next I partially boil the rice to wash away any excess starch and to help each grain of rice expand. I know that many experts say that washing and boiling the rice removes vitamins and nutrients, but whatever nutrients may be lost from the rice will be deliciously replenished by the spices, onions, meat, and vegetable oil.

Lamb flavors the rice. You can make the *qabuli palau* with lamb, beef, or chicken. I think that lamb adds the most flavor to the dish, while beef and chicken nicely absorb the flavors but don't contribute much of their own. The meat, cut into two-inch chunks, cooks on its own in a caramelized onion broth before it's mixed with the rice. It's a good way to use flavorful but tough stew meat, such as lamb shoulder or beef chuck. If I'm using chicken, I choose a big roaster and cut it into quarters.

My special spice mix. Royal Afghan cuisine is one of the most aromatic and varied in the world because of its use of spices. All spices are mixed and ground fresh for each dish, and every cook has personal, well-guarded combinations. When family



Aromatic spices give the rice its distinctive, almost sweet flavor. Clockwise from the top: black peppercorns, cumin seeds, cinnamon, cloves, seeds from brown cardamom, green cardamom pods, and, in the center, delicate saffron threads. The spices are ground fine and mixed with the rice.

members come to visit and remark on a dish they particularly like, I'll mix them up a batch of the spices rather than tell them what's in it.

So now, for the first time, I'm revealing my secret. In *qabuli palau*, I use a mixture of cumin seeds, cloves, black peppercorns, cinnamon, and cardamom (all ground fresh in a coffee grinder), and fine strands of saffron, which I grind with a little salt for abrasion in a mortar and pestle (see photo at right). I never use ground cumin powder, as it doesn't have the same taste and aroma as freshly ground cumin seeds. Saffron and cardamom, the world's two most expensive spices, give the dish a distinctive aroma. I use two types of cardamom, brown and green, for more complex flavor, but you can use just green cardamom. I buy whole pods and break away the papery skin to leave just the black seeds (see photo above). You don't need very much cardamom or saffron for this dish, but if you want to do without them entirely, increase the amount of cloves, cinnamon, and cumin a bit. Most of these spices are readily available in supermarkets, as well as in Indian markets.

SETTING AN AFGHAN TABLE

In an Afghan home, the rice is always placed in the center of the table, surrounded by the stews and salad. First the rice is served on individual plates, and then it is topped with either one or both of the stews. People serve themselves the Afghan *salata* and various chutneys, which are placed on the side of the rice and eaten together with the rice and stews. All meals are also accompanied by warm *nan*, a thin, baked bread that is eaten in both Afghanistan and India. If *nan* isn't available, then I recommend serving pita bread, which has almost the same taste and texture. Fresh fruit and green tea flavored with ground cardamom seeds are a nice way to finish the meal.

Excess starch can make rice grains stick together, so the author rinses the rice until the water runs clear before soaking and cooking it.





Precious saffron, special grinder. To grind fine saffron threads, the author uses a brass mortar and pestle that has been passed down through his royal Afghan family.

DEALING WITH LEFTOVERS, DELICIOUSLY

Afghan royal meals are lavish and always include food for more than the number of invited guests. The recipes included here will serve ten people generously and still leave you with leftovers. Never fear, for Afghan food tastes better the next day, because all the juices will have had time to intermingle and penetrate the rice and vegetables.

Both the rice and eggplant do best when reheated in the oven. Pile up the rice in a mound, pour a cup or so of water over it, and heat for 20 minutes in a 350° oven. Lower the heat to 200° and continue baking for another 15 minutes, until the rice is steaming.

The eggplant should be warmed up in the oven at 350° until it starts to sizzle. Spread a fresh mixture of garlic and yogurt over it and top with more mint.

To warm up the potato stew, put it back in a pot with a little water and heat over medium heat until the water evaporates. Don't use a spatula for mixing, as this would break up the potatoes. Instead, lift up the pot and shake it vigorously.

Ishteya-e-khoob (good appetite).

QABULI PALAU

(Rice with lamb, carrots, and raisins)

You can substitute beef or chicken for the lamb, or even leave the meat out altogether. Whichever meat you use, simmer it just until tender. Serves ten.

4 cups basmati or Carolina long-grain rice

1 Tbs. cumin seeds

1 tsp. whole cloves

1½ tsp. black peppercorns

1-in. piece of cinnamon or ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon

1 tsp. cardamom seeds

½ tsp. saffron threads

Salt

¾ cup vegetable oil

4 yellow onions, sliced thin (about 4 cups)

2 lb. lamb, cut into 2-in. cubes

2 Tbs. salt

3 medium carrots, peeled and julienned (about 2 cups)

2 cups raisins

Wash and soak the rice—Put the rice in a large bowl and fill it with warm water. Wash the rice by stirring it with your hands, being careful not to break the grains. Pour off the water and wash the rice again. Repeat until the water is clear, 3 to 5 times. Then fill the bowl completely with water (about three inches above the rice line) and let the rice soak for one to two hours.

Grind the spices—While the rice soaks, grind the cumin, cloves, peppercorns, cinnamon, and cardamom in a coffee grinder or a mortar and pestle until medium fine. Grind the saffron with a pinch of salt for abrasion in a mortar and pestle. Mix all the spices together and set them aside in a tightly covered bottle or bowl until ready to use.

Cook the meat—Heat the oil in a saucepan large enough to hold the meat. When the oil is hot, put in the onions and fry them over medium-high heat, stirring often so they don't burn, until deep brown, about 30 min. Smash the onions a bit against the side of the pan with a large spoon. Then carefully add the meat, 2 Tbs. salt, and enough water to cover the meat (about 4 cups). Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a rapid simmer. Cook until the meat is slightly tender but still chewy, about 30 min. (If at any time the water evaporates, add more water, ½ cup at a time, until the meat is cooked to the desired consistency.)

Heat the oven to 500°F.

Parboil the carrots and raisins—Bring 2 cups water to a boil in a medium saucepan. Add the carrots and raisins and stir until the carrots are limp, about 3 min. Drain the carrots and raisins and set aside.

Parboil the rice—Fill a large pot two-thirds full of water and bring it to a full boil. Drain the soaked rice in a colan-



Caramelized onions yield a dark broth.

First the meat is simmered in the broth, and then the liquid is mixed with the rice, giving it flavor and a rich brown color.



Deep holes allow steam and air to bring the flavors together. During the hour the dish bakes, juices from buried mounds of lamb, carrots, and raisins intermingle with the spices and rice.



Each grain of rice should “stand and smile” after it has been cooked, a sign that it has been handled properly.



der and rinse it with cool water. Then put the rice in the boiling water and stir it very carefully so as not to break the grains. I do this by using a flat spatula and turning the rice from bottom to top. Boil the rice until the outside of the grain is slightly soft, about 5 min. I test this by biting a grain. Remove the rice from the heat and drain it in the colander. Rinse it again with cold water.

Assemble the palau—Pour the rice into a large, oval-shaped roasting pan or Dutch oven with a cover. Lift the meat out from the onion mixture and set aside. Pour the remaining liquid and dissolved onions on the rice. Sprinkle on the spices and carefully mix it all together. Chew a few grains of rice to taste for salt and add more if necessary.

Dig a hole in one side of the pile of rice and bury the meat in it. Then open up the other side and put in the carrots and raisins. Cover it all up with rice, shaping it into a mound, in such a way that only the bottom of the pile is touching the pan and the sides and top of the rice are free of contact (this allows the rice to bake evenly). Using the handle of the spatula, make a deep hole in the center of the mound and surround that by four more holes. The holes allow the heat and steam to penetrate deeply. Touch the bottom of the pan with your index finger. The liquid level

should cover the first joint of your finger. If it doesn't, add more water.

Bake the palau—Cover the pan and put it in a 500° oven for 15 min. Then lower the heat to 200° and continue baking for another 45 min.

Present the palau—Take the pan out of the oven and remove the lid immediately to prevent moisture from forming on the rice and making it soggy. If you don't plan to serve the rice immediately, either leave the rice in the oven on low heat or put several sheets of paper towels between the rice and the lid to soak up the moisture.

When serving, carefully uncover the buried carrots and raisins and transfer them to a plate. Do the same for the meat. Using a flat spatula, dig up rice from the bottom and fan it back on top. This mixes all the juices that are sitting on the bottom of the pan.

Spread about four or five spatulas of rice over the base of a large serving dish. Then place the meat on the rice and cover it with the rest of the rice, shaping it into a mound. Spread the carrots and raisins over the top and serve.

BANJAN BORANI

(Eggplant with tomato and yogurt)

The tangy, garlic-laced yogurt contrasts nicely with the sweet tomato sauce and tender eggplant. It's garnished with dried mint, which you can find in the spice section of a supermarket or in a Middle Eastern market. *Serves ten.*

Vegetable oil

2 yellow onions, sliced thin (about 2 cups)

1 tsp. turmeric

32 oz. canned crushed tomatoes

6 oz. (1 small can) tomato paste

2½ tsp. salt

1 green bell pepper, cored, seeded and cut into four pieces

16 oz. plain yogurt

4 cloves garlic, minced

2 large eggplant (about 2½ lb. total), unpeeled, sliced into ½-in. rounds

2 to 3 Tbs. crushed dried mint

Heat ¼ cup oil in a large saucepan until hot. Add the onions and sauté them, stirring occasionally, until light brown, about 20 min. Sprinkle in the turmeric and stir to coat the onions. Add the crushed tomatoes, tomato paste, 1½ tsp. of the salt, and green pepper. Bring to a boil and then lower the heat to a simmer. Cook, stirring often to prevent the sauce from sticking to the bottom of the pan and burning, until all the water evaporates and the mixture thickens, about 30 min. Keep the sauce warm while you proceed.

Whisk together the yogurt and garlic in a bowl, add the remaining 1 tsp. salt, and set aside.

Cook the eggplant by either frying it on the stove or broiling it in the oven. To fry the eggplant, heat ½ cup of oil in a large frying pan. When the oil is hot, slide in as many eggplant slices as can fit in the pan in a single layer. Cook the eggplant until the bottom is soft and brown, and then flip the pieces over and brown the other side, about 4 min. per side. Once browned, remove the eggplant from the oil with a flat, slotted spatula and put the slices in the tomato sauce. Add more oil to the frying pan as needed and cook the rest of the eggplant in batches the same way.

If you choose to broil the eggplant instead, brush the rounds with oil and arrange them in a single layer on a baking sheet. Broil until browned and soft on top, flip them over, brush with more oil, and brown the other side, about 4 min. on each side. Put the cooked eggplant in the tomato



Simple flavors burst from the eggplant stew—sweet tomatoes, garlic, tangy yogurt, crushed mint—balancing the more intricately flavored rice dish.

sauce. When all the eggplant is in the tomato sauce, hold the handles of the saucepan and shake the pot from side to side until most of the slices are covered with sauce. If you like, remove the green pepper. Keep warm over low heat.

To assemble the eggplant, spread one-quarter of the yogurt mixture on the bottom of a deep, flat serving dish or platter. Using a flat spatula, dish out the eggplant and sauce mixture and spread it over the yogurt. Drizzle the rest of the yogurt mixture on top. Sprinkle the dried mint over the yogurt and serve.

SALAND-E-KACHALOO

(Potato stew)

Start this stew well ahead of time—it takes about an hour and a half to cook, and the flavor only improves the longer it sits. I often make this into a heartier dish by first stewing two pounds of beef in the onions until tender before adding the potatoes. *Serves ten.*

1 cup vegetable oil
4 yellow onions, sliced thin (about 4 cups)
1 tsp. turmeric
4 cloves garlic, crushed, or 1 Tbs. garlic powder
3 beef bouillon cubes (optional)
5 lb. potatoes (about 12), peeled and cut into 2-in. cubes
16 oz. canned crushed tomatoes
1 cup water
1 green bell pepper, cored, seeded and cut into 1-in. rings
3 Tbs. coriander seeds, ground fine, or 2 Tbs. ground coriander
2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. ground black pepper
Leaves from 1 bunch fresh coriander (cilantro), chopped coarse (about 2 cups, lightly packed)

In a large, heavy saucepan (preferably nonstick), heat the vegetable oil. When the oil is hot, add the onions and sauté over medium heat until golden, about 15 min. Sprinkle the turmeric, garlic, and bouillon cubes over the onions and stir a few times.

Add the potatoes, crushed tomatoes, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the water. Cook over medium heat for 25 min. (the potatoes will be half-cooked). Carefully scrape the bottom of the pot with a spatula every few minutes to prevent the potatoes from sticking. Add the bell pepper, ground coriander seeds, salt, and pepper. If the mixture looks too dry, add more water, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup at a time. Continue cooking and

scraping until the potatoes are soft, about 45 min. more. To prevent the potatoes from being crushed by too much stirring, lift the pot from the burner every now and then and shake it vigorously to redistribute the liquid and spices. If any water remains, reduce the heat to low and simmer until it evaporates.

Just before serving, stir in the fresh coriander.

SALATA

(Afghan salad)

You can mix the tomatoes, onions, and coriander together ahead of time and keep the salad chilled in the refrigerator until you're ready to serve. Add the lemon and salt right before serving to prevent the salad from getting soggy. *Serves ten.*

3 large tomatoes, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. dice (about 4 cups)
2 onions, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. dice (about 2 cups)
Leaves from 1 bunch fresh coriander (cilantro), chopped coarse (about 2 cups, lightly packed)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lemon juice
 $\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. salt

Toss together the tomatoes, onion, and coriander, pour in the lemon juice and sprinkle on the salt. Toss again and serve.

Putting it all together

1 DAY BEFORE DINNER

- ◆ Caramelize the onions and cook the lamb for the *palau*
- ◆ Make the tomato sauce for the eggplant stew

DAY OF DINNER

- ◆ Wash, soak, and parboil the rice
- ◆ Grind the spices for the *palau*
- ◆ Cook the eggplant
- ◆ Whisk the garlic and yogurt together for the eggplant stew
- ◆ Cook the potato stew
- ◆ Assemble the *palau*
- ◆ Chop the vegetables for the *salata*

1 TO 2 HOURS BEFORE SERVING

- ◆ Bake the *palau*

THE GUESTS ARE WAITING

- ◆ Dress the *salata* with lemon juice
- ◆ Reheat and assemble the eggplant stew
- ◆ Add the fresh coriander to the potato stew
- ◆ Assemble the cooked *palau* on a platter

Prince Ali Seraj inherited his passion for cooking from his grandfather, King Habibullah of Afghanistan. Seraj always makes plenty of food in case family and friends drop by his Milford, Connecticut, house. ♦

Great Mashed Potatoes

Choosing the right potato is the key to a fine mash

BY DAVID EVERETT



For the best mashed potatoes, choose one of these russet varieties. At left, the Yukon Gold; center, "blue" potatoes, which are identical in texture to Yukons; and right, the classic Idaho potato. The author prefers Yukons for their starchy texture, golden color, and natural sweetness.

It's time people realized that creating perfect mashed potatoes is a worthy pursuit. Mashed potatoes are no ordinary side dish. Sure you can find a scoop of mash on just about any blue-plate special, but really good mashed potatoes aren't easy to come by. In my kitchen, I do more than boil and crush spuds for easy consumption; I use mashed potatoes to accompany everything from sautéed duck breast to rack of lamb.

GREAT MASHING POTATOES

My definition of a perfect mashed potato is one that's smooth, thick, and full of flavor. Toward that end, I use a potato that's dry and starchy. Russets, with their low water content, are ideal. Idahoes are the most common russet variety, but also look for Yukon Golds (which usually are yellowish, but even come in shades of purple and blue). For my money, the Yukon is the most noble potato. Thin-skinned but starchy, uniform in size and shape, it has a beautiful buttery color and a flavor that's naturally sweet. Seek potatoes that are dull and dusty yet plump and full, regular in shape, and without cuts, bruises, shriveling, or sprouting.

Some people like new potatoes and fingerlings (small, skinny varieties) that have been mashed with

their skins, but these potatoes have a water content that makes them fit for frying, boiling, and steaming, but not for creating mashed potatoes with the texture I want.

No matter which potatoes you choose, store them in a dark, well-ventilated place. Room temperature is ideal. Refrigerated, potatoes begin to convert their starch to sugar, which causes soft and wrinkled skin, mealiness, and a loss of the "potatoey" flavor. Also, don't keep potatoes in the light or they'll turn green and sprout. There's even some debate that the green is toxic if eaten in quantity. A greened potato is safe to eat after you cut out the color, but a once-toxic potato can't be at its best. Also, don't store onions and potatoes together; they exchange mutually detrimental gases that, besides smelling terrible, cause breakdown. They need separate but equal treatment.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

Choose potatoes of a uniform size to ensure they cook in the same amount of time. Don't trim the potatoes to size. If you cut or peel potatoes before boiling, the unprotected potato will gain water weight that will later give you mush instead of mash.



Boil first, peel later.
A peeled potato absorbs too much water during boiling. Here, Everett uses a curved paring knife to remove the thin skin from a still-hot Yukon Gold.

When you have the perfect potato, boil it. Bring a pot of cold water to a boil. (Cold water takes longer to boil than hot, but since hot water comes from a holding tank, it can carry off flavors.) After the water is boiling, add about a tablespoon of salt for every quart. (Salted water boils more slowly.) This may seem like a lot of salt, but there's a difference in the flavor of potatoes cooked in salted water and plain potatoes salted after cooking. Finally, put scrubbed potatoes into the pot. Simmer the potatoes, uncovered, until a knife inserts easily, about 35 minutes. Drain the potatoes immediately; left to soak, they can become waterlogged.

None of my recipes is for "skins-on" mashed potatoes. Peeling the boiled potatoes is an optional step, because when you put a potato through a food mill, the potato is separated from its skin. However, you should peel your potatoes before mashing if you're making enormous quantities of potatoes (too many potato skins will clog the mill's mesh) or if you want a mashed potato free of even minuscule flecks of potato skin.

If you want perfectly "peel-less" potatoes, peel them when they're still almost too hot to handle; the potato's heat aids the peeling process. Hold the potato in one hand and, with a curved paring knife held at a 120° angle with the blade toward you, drag the knife over the potato's surface. The only time you might need to cut into the potato is on the first stroke. Yukon Golds have a very thin skin that comes off with a light touch; Idahoes, with their thicker skin, are a little tougher to deal with, and the potatoes tend to flake apart.

USE A FOOD MILL FOR MASHING

For me, there's only one potato-mashing tool: the food mill. It's nothing but an ancient food processor, but it's invaluable today. Essentially, it's a bowl with

a hand-turned blade that forces food through a perforated disk. You put the food in the bowl and crank the handle clockwise; the blade forces the food through the mesh.

Food mills are good for puréeing many foods, but they're ideal for making mashed potatoes. Food mills do more than mash the potatoes; when the potatoes are pushed through the mesh, the potato skins are removed and the potato flesh is "aerated," drying it further, fluffing it up, and helping it avoid a mushy future.

Food mills are made from metals like aluminum, tin, and stainless steel, and they range in price from \$35 to \$200. A good food mill should be made so that it's easy to clean—it shouldn't have a lot of nooks and crannies in which debris can be trapped. The largest cost factor is the mill's size and quality. Look for one that has a strong frame that comes with interchangeable disks in a variety of mesh sizes. Once you become acquainted with the food mill, you'll use it a lot, so don't settle for one that you feel won't live up to frequent bouts of work. A ricer is a decent (but by no means equal) substitute for a food mill. But never use a food processor to mash potatoes. The whirring blades will quickly produce a batch of extraordinarily gummy potatoes.

ENHANCING THE BASIC MASH

After your potatoes are mashed, move fast. Nothing is as unappealing as cold mashed potatoes, and since they don't take kindly to reheating (they become gummy and lose flavor), it's important to keep the mashed potatoes warm as you mix in the flavorings. You can do this by keeping the potatoes in a double boiler as you work, but it may be simpler to work very quickly, or to occasionally return the pan to the stove, or both.

Begin by stirring the potatoes vigorously as you add cold—not melted—butter. You want butter to add its richness, creaminess, and flavor, and melted butter adds only flavor in a stream of hot fat. Add butter in small amounts. Incorporate each butter portion before adding another; this is key to a finer, smoother mash.

In the interest of keeping the potatoes warm, heat the milk before you add it. And when you heat the milk, add seasonings such as sea salt, freshly

ground black pepper, and nutmeg. The milk's heat helps to break down the spices and to expand their flavors. Stir the potatoes constantly as you add the warm milk in a slow, steady stream.

The final step is another mashing, this time through the food mill's finest mesh. Some may see two mashings as excessive, but it definitely makes a difference. Try it before you dismiss it, unless you're dedicated to potatoes with lumps or don't care for silky mashed potatoes. If you want fresh herbs in your mashed potatoes, add them at the very last to preserve the herbs' aromatic properties and to ensure that they don't get mangled in the mashing, which would turn your potatoes green.

The mashed potato is pure and sublime in its unadulterated form, but there's plenty of room for enhancement. When considering variations, look at the potatoes' role in the meal. Is the mash complementing something full flavored, such as seared duck breast or a confit? You might use a little duck fat instead of butter for an intense, rich, and robust flavor. If you're serving potatoes with something lighter, like a paillard of veal, try enriching them with olive oil. If your childhood memories plead for it, flavor your potatoes with margarine. Substituting buttermilk or goat's milk for cow's creates a subtle but tangy finish.

Again, mashed potatoes are best when served immediately. If they must wait, keep the potatoes warm, uncovered, in a double boiler. Covering the potatoes creates condensation—more unwanted moisture.

BASIC MASHED POTATOES

This is the mashed potato that can accompany meatloaf, fried chicken, or a fine steak. *Yields about 4 cups.*

*2½ qt. cold water (approximately)
2 Tbs. sea salt
2 lb. medium Idaho or Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, scrubbed
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into ½-Tbs. slices
½ cup hot milk
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
Nutmeg to taste*

Bring the water to a boil; add the salt. Add the potatoes, reduce the heat to medium, and cook the potatoes until tender, about 35 min. Drain immediately.

If you want to peel the potatoes, do this as soon as they're cool enough to handle. (Most of the peel will be removed by the food mill, if you're using one.) Grind the



The food mill separates peel from potato. When the mill's blade is turned, the roasted garlic and skin-on potatoes are pushed through the fine mesh of the mill's disk, but the potato skin stays behind. The result is a smooth potato purée.

potatoes through a food mill using a fine mesh. Alternatively, peel the potatoes and put them through a ricer.

Keep the potatoes warm in a large double boiler as you add the butter; stir the potatoes constantly with a wooden spoon. Wait until each butter slice has been incorporated before adding more.

Slowly add the hot milk to the potatoes, stirring constantly. Grind the potatoes through the food mill again, this time using the finest mesh.

Season to taste with a pinch each of salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Keep the potatoes warm in a double boiler, uncovered, until served.

SUPER-RICH MASHED POTATOES

In addition to a good dose of butter and cream, Yukon Golds—with their naturally golden yellow color—make these mashed potatoes taste especially rich. *Yields about 5 cups.*

*2½ qt. cold water (approximately)
2 Tbs. sea salt
2 lb. Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, scrubbed
½ lb. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into ½-Tbs. slices
¾ cup hot heavy cream
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste*

Bring the water to a boil; add the salt. Add the potatoes, reduce the heat to medium, and cook the potatoes until tender, about 35 min. Drain immediately.

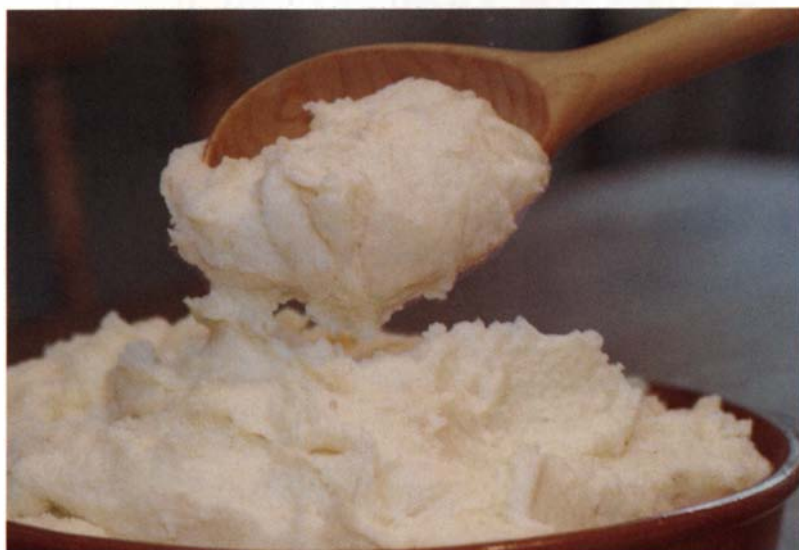
If you want to peel the potatoes, do this as soon as they're cool enough to handle. (Most of the peel will be removed by the food mill.) Grind the potatoes through a food mill using a fine mesh.

Keep the potatoes warm in a large double boiler as you add the butter; stir the potatoes constantly. Wait until each butter slice has been incorporated before adding more.

Slowly add the hot cream to the potatoes, stirring constantly. Grind the potatoes through the food mill again, this time using the finest mesh.

Season to taste with salt and pepper. Keep warm in a double boiler, uncovered, until served.

Stir hot potatoes quickly and add cold butter slowly for a smooth mash. After the potatoes are put through a food mill, mix in small pieces of cold butter. Each piece of butter should be nearly incorporated before adding another. If the potatoes get cold faster than you work, use a double boiler or occasionally return the pan to the stove.



Silky mashed potatoes are the result of milling twice. A second pass through the food mill's finest mesh creates perfectly smooth mashed potatoes.

ROASTED-GARLIC MASHED POTATOES

Roasted garlic tastes nutty and sweet, quite without the pungent edge of fresh garlic. Be sure to use a head with firm, moist cloves; if you have roasted garlic left over, don't throw it out. It tastes wonderful spread on toasted country bread. *Yields about 5 cups.*

3 Tbs. sea salt
1 whole head garlic
2 sprigs fresh thyme
2½ qt. cold water (approximately)
2 lb. Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, scrubbed
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into ½-Tbs. slices
½ cup buttermilk
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Heat the oven to 350°F. Sprinkle 1 Tbs. of the sea salt on a small, ovenproof dish. Put the garlic head and thyme on the salt and cover with foil. Bake until the garlic is soft, about 45 min. Allow the garlic to cool slightly, then break the head into cloves and peel the garlic.

Bring the water to a boil and add the remaining sea salt. Add the potatoes, reduce the heat to medium, and cook the potatoes until they're tender, about 35 min. Drain immediately.

If you want to peel the potatoes, do this as soon as they're cool enough to handle. (Most of the peel will be removed by the food mill.) Grind the potatoes and half of the garlic cloves through a food mill.

Keep the potatoes warm in a large double boiler as you add the butter in thin slices; stir the potatoes constantly. Wait until each butter slice has been incorporated before adding more.

Warm the buttermilk (it may curdle slightly; this is not a problem). Slowly add the warm buttermilk to the potatoes, stirring constantly. Mix well. Season to taste with salt and pepper. If you want to add additional garlic, mash the cloves with a fork and add to taste.

Grind the potatoes through the food mill again, this time using the finest mesh. Keep warm in a double boiler, uncovered, until served.

LOW-FAT MASHED POTATOES

These butterless potatoes get their flavor from sautéed onions and fresh herbs. *Yields about 4½ cups.*

2½ qt. water (approximately)
1 Tbs. sea salt
2 lb. Idaho or Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, scrubbed
2 Tbs. olive oil
1 small onion (about 2 oz.), sliced thin
½ cup hot skim milk
2 Tbs. mixed chopped chives, chervil, and parsley
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
Nutmeg to taste

Bring the water to a boil; add the salt. Add the potatoes, reduce the heat to medium, and cook until the potatoes are tender, about 35 min. Drain immediately.

If you want to peel the potatoes, do this as soon as they're cool enough to handle. (Most of the peel will be removed by the food mill.)

While the potatoes are cooking, heat the olive oil in a small sauté pan over low heat. Add the onion and sauté until translucent and soft, about 10 min.

Add the sautéed onion to the drained potatoes and grind the vegetables through a food mill using a fine mesh. Slowly add the hot milk to the potatoes, stirring constantly.

Grind the potatoes through the food mill again, this time using the finest mesh.

Add the herbs to the potatoes and season to taste with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Keep warm in a double boiler, uncovered, until served.

David Everett is a Certified Executive Chef at The Dining Room at Ford's Colony in Williamsburg, Virginia. ♦

Gravlax

Sweden's cured salmon makes ideal party fare

BY CHRISTER LARSSON



Easy curing method yields tender, delicately flavored salmon. Dill sprigs are placed between two salmon fillets after the fish is rubbed with salt, sugar, and spices (left). The salmon cures for 48 hours, leaving it shiny, translucent, and 10% to 15% smaller (above). The salmon will lose a good deal of water, but don't throw out the salty liquid; brush just a little on the sliced gravlax to add extra flavor.

Swedes are renowned hosts. Fittingly, the Swedish dish gravlax is perfect for parties. Translated literally, *gravlax* means “salmon from the grave.” The “grave” refers to the curing method in which the fish is “buried” (marinated, actually) in salt, pepper, sugar, and dill for 48 hours. The curing process leaves the fish with a subtle flavor that recalls the ocean, and although it isn’t smoked, gravlax has a texture as tender as that of the best smoked salmon. Yet for all these sensual rewards, gravlax is easy to prepare.

Making gravlax is little more than a matter of assembling and waiting. The salmon fillets are lightly coated with spices, and then herbs or spices are strewn between two fillets. This fish “sandwich” is laid in a dish, covered with plastic wrap, and refrigerated. That’s the extent of your work. A few

Photos: Robert Marsala

days later, you're impressing your friends with home-made gravlax.

MAKING GRAVLAX

Gravlax really lets the salmon's flavor shine through, so it's important to use top-quality, super-fresh fish. Two pounds of salmon fillets should feed about four people as an entrée, six or more as an appetizer. You can make gravlax with fillets of any size. In any case, ask your fishmonger to fillet the fish for you.

Preparing the salmon. After you've bought your salmon fillet, the next step is to remove the tiny pin bones that run along the fish's spine. An average whole fillet contains about 30 pin bones. Heavy-duty tweezers or needle-nose pliers are ideal tools. No matter which instrument you choose, sterilize it with hot, soapy water before and after use. Run your fingertips lightly over the fish to feel the gentle prick of the bones. When you locate a bone, grasp its tip with the tweezers and tug it in the same direction as the grain of the fish. The bones run in a wavy line, and removing them should take no more than a couple of minutes.

Cut the boned fillet in half to create two pieces of equal size. The halves will form the "bread" of the gravlax "sandwich." You may need to trim the pieces a little to make them nearly even.

The curing ingredients. The "sandwich filling" is the herbs that flavor the gravlax. Dill is the most common gravlax seasoning, but there are other options. Cilantro and chiles create a spicy southwestern flavor; fresh thyme can add a deeper herbal note. Avoid strong seasonings like rosemary and garlic because they become overwhelming in the curing process. Only fresh ingredients are appropriate for gravlax. Dill and other herbs need only a gentle rinse, but no chopping. Chiles should be chopped for better distribution.

The "rub"—a mixture of sugar, salt, pepper, and allspice that is patted on the fillets—cures the fish. The rub uses exactly twice as much sugar as salt, but a



Coat all sides of the salmon fillets with the spice rub. A thin layer of spices should also coat the bottom of the dish that holds the gravlax while it cures.

properly prepared gravlax is neither salty nor sweet. Using the right kind of salt is important. I strongly recommend high-quality coarse sea salt, which has no chemical aftertaste. The spices should be of a fairly coarse grind. To create the correct texture, put the spices on a cutting board, circle them with a towel to prevent them from scattering, and crush them with the bottom of a heavy pan or with the flat of a large knife. Don't use a spice mill; the grind will be too fine.

Assembling the gravlax. Rub the spices on all sides of the salmon fillets. Lay one fillet, skin side down, in a ceramic, glass, or nonaluminum metal dish. Spread the dill on top of the fillet. Put the other fillet, skin side up, on top of the dill. Tightly cover the dish in plastic wrap and refrigerate it. After 24 hours, unwrap the gravlax and flip it over. Then rewrap the dish and return it to the refrigerator for 24 to 30 hours. At the end of the curing, the gravlax will be firm but pliable and slightly translucent. Expect to see the gravlax lose a good deal of liquid, which will accumulate in the dish; the fish should shrink by 10% to 15%.

SERVING GRAVLAX

The only last-minute preparation gravlax requires is slicing and arranging on a platter. Traditionally, gravlax is served with a mustard-dill sauce (see recipe on p. 54) and toasted white bread. In any case, it's best to enjoy gravlax within 48 to 72 hours of making it.

When you slice gravlax, it's very important to use a thin, sharp knife that has a scalloped, but not serrated, edge. Start at the tail end of the fillet, hold your knife at a 10° angle to the surface of the fish, and begin making horizontal slices. The slices should be thin enough for you to see the knife moving through the flesh.

As you slice, you'll see an increasingly broad, red-brown region centered at the base of each slice. This



Use tweezers to remove the slender pin bones. If you run your fingers gently down the center of the salmon fillet, you'll feel the prick of the bones. Pin bones should be pulled out in the same direction as the grain of the fish.



Slice gravlax paper-thin with a real slicing knife. The long, thin knife with a slightly scalloped edge is held at a 10° angle to the gravlax. You should be able to see the outline of the knife as you make the cut.

Gravlax was made for appetizers and party platters. Slices of gravlax lend themselves to easy and colorful presentation, and they're perfect for serving on crackers or toasted rounds of bread. Iced aquavit is a traditional—and bracing—accompaniment.

area, the “bloodline,” is harmless but unattractive. Fold each slice in half and use a small, sharp, straight-edged knife to cut out the bloodline triangle.

To complete the gravlax presentation, brush a little of the curing juices directly on the gravlax. This provides a nice sheen and a little extra flavor. Don't use too much, however; a heavy hand with the intense liquid could mean undue saltiness.

GRAVLAX

Serve gravlax at a party and devour morning-after leftovers with cream cheese and bagels. Serves six or more as an appetizer.

2 lb. fresh fillet of salmon, skin on
1 bunch fresh dill, with stems
2 Tbs. coarse sea salt
1 tsp. black peppercorns, cracked
¼ cup sugar
½ tsp. whole allspice, cracked

Gently run your fingertips over the cut side of the fish to locate the prick of pin bones. When you feel a bone, grasp its tip with heavy-duty tweezers or needle-nose pliers and tug it toward the fish's head end.



Wash and shake dry the bunch of dill. Trim the dill to the same length as the fillet. Combine the salt, pepper, sugar, and allspice and rub this mixture on both sides of the salmon fillets. Put one fillet, skin side down, in a nonaluminum baking dish that's just large enough to hold the salmon. Cover the fillet with the dill; the herb should be thick and well distributed. Lay the other fillet on top, skin side up. Cover the dish tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate it. After 24 hours, unwrap the dish, flip the “sandwich” upside down. Rewrap the dish and return it to the refrigerator for another 24 to 30 hours. At the end of the curing period, liquid released by the gravlax will cover the bottom of the dish. Unwrap the dish, separate the fillets, and scrape away the herbs and spices. Reserve some of the curing liquid.

To slice the gravlax, use a thin, sharp knife with a scalloped (but not serrated) edge. Hold the knife at a 10° angle and, starting from the tail end, begin slicing the gravlax into pieces no thicker than ¼ in. The slices should be so

Choosing salmon for gravlax

Fresh salmon may contain parasites, which can be destroyed by cooking or freezing. The gravlax curing process may kill some parasites, but it doesn't guarantee that all of them will be destroyed. Wild salmon is more prone to parasites than farmed Atlantic salmon. I've developed excellent relationships with seafood suppliers, who ensure I receive farmed salmon that's both fresh and free of parasites. If you're not certain about the fresh fish available to you, make gravlax with commercially frozen salmon. While parasites also die in a home freezer, freezing fresh fish at home isn't advisable. Commercial freezing does two things: it ensures your fish is parasite-free (no parasite can live in a 0°F deep-freeze for a week), and it freezes the fish almost instantly. This means few ice crystals form and your fish will maintain a near-fresh texture when it thaws. Home freezing is much slower, which means that the fish must remain in the freezer longer to ensure that all parasites are dead, and it offers ample opportunity for ice-crystal formation. When you thaw the fish and the ice melts, the fish's cell membranes begin to break down. The result is a mushy fish, and one that's far from ideal for making gravlax.—C.L.

thin that you can see through the flesh and watch the knife's movement. After you've sliced all the gravlax, remove the bloodline. To do this, fold each slice in half; the bloodline will form a triangle. Use a small, sharp, straight-edged knife to remove the triangle with one slice.

Arrange the gravlax slices on a platter and lightly brush with the reserved curing liquid. Serve with thin slices of toasted bread and mustard-dill sauce.

MUSTARD-DILL SAUCE

Steady whisking while slowly pouring the oil ensures a smooth, emulsified sauce. Yields 1 cup.

3 Tbs. Dijon mustard
2 Tbs. red-wine vinegar
2 tsp. sugar
¾ cup corn, canola, or other mild oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup chopped fresh dill

In a stainless-steel bowl, combine the mustard, vinegar, and sugar. Pour in the oil, using a very slow and steady trickle, whisking constantly. When all the oil is incorporated, it should have the texture and appearance of mayonnaise. Season to taste with a pinch of salt, some pepper, and the fresh dill.

Christer Larsson is the chef/owner of Christer's, a Scandinavian-inspired restaurant in New York City. ♦



Exploring Sparkling Wine

It doesn't have to be Champagne to be delicious

BY NICK TROILO

While French Champagne is the most celebrated and well-documented sparkling wine, it isn't the only one with merit. Through some rather enjoyable study over recent years, I've learned that the winemaking methods used in that tiny corner of France are employed throughout the world to make high-quality, reasonably priced, appealing wines.

IF IT HAS BUBBLES, IS IT CHAMPAGNE?

The traditional method of making sparkling wine owes much to the innovation of an 18th-century French monk named Dom Pérignon. The French have since laid claim to the method and reserved the name "Champagne" for their wines produced by this method (see sidebar on p. 56). True Champagne must be made from chardonnay, pinot meunier, or pinot noir grapes (or a combination) grown entirely in the Champagne district. The process, time-consuming and costly, requires more than a hundred hands-on operations.

Today, most winemakers throughout the world respect the historic claim of the French to the name "Champagne" and instead use terms such as *méthode champenoise* or simply "sparkling wine" for the wines they make according to this classic process. Italy calls such wines *metodo classico* or *metodo tradizionale*; Spain uses the word *cava*. A group of American producers has established the term CMCV (Classic Method, Classic Varieties) to designate highest-quality sparklers made primarily from traditional Champagne varietals in the time-honored eight-step process. As of September 1994, new regulations from the European Economic Community limit the use of

Effervescence adds an extra dimension to sparkling wines. The bubbles, called "beads," help carry the aromas to your nose, and the fizzy texture refreshes your palate.

What makes wine sparkle?

The traditional method of making sparkling wines, called *méthode champenoise*, follows these eight steps:

1. PRESSING THE GRAPES to extract the juice. As with olive oil, the best wines come from the first pressing.

2. ADDING YEAST TO FERMENT the grape juice into wine.

3. BLENDING THE WINE to produce the “house” style desired by the winemaker, who selects from wines produced from various vintages and locations.

4. BOTTLING THE WINE FOR THE SECOND FERMENTATION. More yeast is added to the wine, and then the bottle is sealed with a metal cap so that this fermentation, which produces the bubbles, takes place in the bottle.

5. “RIDDLING” THE BOTTLES (*remuage*), which are arranged in a rack, by gradually turning and inverting them during an eight-week period until they are upside down. Riddling allows the yeast sediment to accumulate in the neck of the bottle.

6. “DISGORGING” THE SEDIMENT (*dégorgement*) by freezing the neck of the bottle with super-cold liquid and removing the frozen plug of sediment.

7. ADDING SUGAR (cane sugar dissolved in wine) to bring the wine to the sweetness level desired. This step is optional depending on the style of the wine.

8. TOPPING OFF THE BOTTLE with additional wine to replace the small amount lost in disgorging, and finally corking the bottle.—N.T.

the term *méthode champenoise* to French sparkling wines made in this traditional way.

Sparkling wines are made in other ways in France and in other wine-producing countries. In the Charmat (or bulk) process, the secondary fermentation takes place in large tanks rather than in the bottle. The sediment is then filtered out as the wine goes from tank to bottle. Because the Charmat process is not as labor-intensive, wines made in this way are generally less expensive than wines made in the traditional method.

In the transfer method, the second fermentation takes place in a bottle, just as in *méthode champenoise*. Next, however, the contents of many bottles are mixed in a pressurized vat, the sediment filtered out (eliminating the costly riddling and disgorging steps), and the wine returned to the washed bottles. This actually allows for more uniform quality from one bottle to the next.

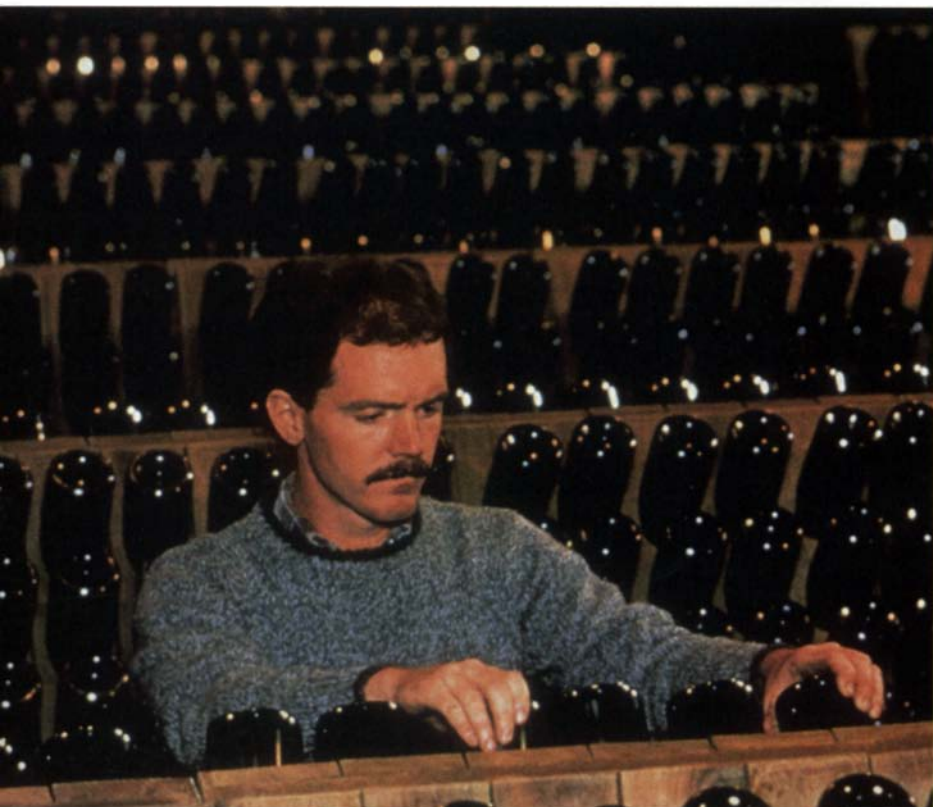
“Champagne” on the label of an American sparkling wine often means a wine of inferior quality that has been carbonated, as soft drinks are, to create bubbles. These wines generally sell for under \$5 and have little flavor interest.

JUDGING THE APPEAL OF SPARKLING WINE

Evaluating sparkling wines is quite similar to evaluating still wines, with the added interest of the bubbles, or “beads,” and the overall effervescence, or “mousse.” As with all wines, the first appeal is how the wine looks in the glass. To judge appearance, we look not only for clarity, intensity, and attractiveness of color, but also for the size and liveliness of the beads. Generally, the smaller the beads, the longer they last. They should flow in a steady stream that collects in a ring (“collar”) at the edge of the glass.

Next we judge the wine’s aroma, or “bouquet.” Since we actually gather most of a wine’s flavors through our sense of smell, this step is essential. But don’t swirl the glass as you would with still wines—the bubbles themselves will carry the scents to your nose, and you don’t want to dissipate the effervescence. Some wines will show yeasty, doughy qualities; others will give off aromas of apples, lemons, peaches, or even butter. These variables reflect the type of grape used, the vineyard conditions (such as soil and climate), and the winemaker’s skill in blending different samples, or “lots,” to produce an interesting, complex result. Of course, part of enjoying the “nose” of sparkling wine is the tickle. Perhaps that is one reason sparkling wines are often used to celebrate—it’s hard to put your nose into a glass of sparkling wine and not smile.

The appearance and fragrance of the wine should build your anticipation toward your first sip. The most interesting wines will deliver a full-bodied



Riddling is just one of the many steps in making traditional sparkling wines. The time-consuming process of turning and

inverting the bottles allows the winemaker to remove all the sediment that’s created during the second fermentation.

Sparkler-speak

Key terms found on the labels of many sparkling wines can help you understand what type of wine is in the bottle.

Sweetness level

A sparkling wine becomes sweet by the addition of sugar after the second fermentation.

Brut is dry, with no more than 2% sugar.

Extra-dry, despite its name, is a little sweeter than brut, with up to 3% sugar.

Sec will be quite sweet, with 3% to 6% sugar.

Demi-sec is the sweetest category of sparkling wine, at 6% to 8% sugar.

Vintage vs. nonvintage

Most sparkling wines are not bottlings of a single vintage (unlike good-quality still wines), but rather a blend of wine from different years and locations. Blending helps the winemaker maintain a consistent style from year to year. In years when the harvest is very good, however, producers in Champagne and elsewhere may choose to declare a "vintage" year, in which a portion of their production will come from grapes of that vintage only.

Vintage (millésime) sparkling wines are more expensive and generally of higher quality, but because each producer's vintage varies from year to year, the consumer needs to follow vintage quality and availability.

Varieties

Blanc de blancs (white wine from white grapes) is made primarily from chardonnay and has a fairly light body.

Blanc de noirs (white wine from "black" grapes) has a fuller body and comes primarily from pinot noir or pinot meunier grapes, or a blend of both.

Rosé sparkling wine, which is very full bodied, is made by macerating pinot noir grapes with their skins to infuse the juice with some flavor and tannin.





Choose the right glass for more fizz and flavor. When choosing glasses to serve a sparkling wine, avoid low, wide “coupe” cups (left) that dissipate the sparkler’s delightful bubbles. Save these for sherbet and stick with tall, slim “tulips” (center) or “flutes” (right). These let you admire the rising beads and the collar they form at the

surface. The tall, narrow shape of these glasses also concentrates the wine’s aromas in a small space, delivering them—as the bubbles pop—right to your nose. Many experts use nothing but hot water to wash their glassware, claiming that detergent residue not only imparts off flavors, but actually prevents bubbles from forming.

mousse to the tip of the tongue. Next, look at the wine’s balance. Is it as sweet or dry as expected, as light or full-bodied, as crisp or as creamy? Finally, evaluate the finish of the wine. How long do the flavors remain? Do new or different flavors develop as you savor the wine? Are you tempted to take another sip?

CHAMPAGNE VS. OTHER SPARKLERS

Although I usually choose a Champagne for special celebrations, for most occasions I can find high-quality, good-value sparkling wines from various areas of the world. Other areas of France, notably Vouvray in the Loire region, produce good *vins mousseux* at affordable prices. Spanish *cavas*, also relatively inexpensive, offer fresh, fruity flavors for everyday quaffing. The best ones come from the Penedès region just west of Barcelona in Catalonia. Although these are traditionally made from Spanish white grapes, including parellada, viura (also called Macabeo), and the exotic-sounding xarel-lo, recent plantings of classic varietals promise future bottlings in the French style. *Cavas* to look for include Segura Viudas, Castellblanch (their Brut Zero has no added sugar), and Paul Cheneau, in addition to Codorníu and Freixenet.

The Italian term *spumante* simply means “sparkling,” and the best-known examples come from the town of Asti in the Piedmont region. Although these Asti Spumante and Moscato d’Asti wines, made

from the muscat grape, are usually sweet enough to serve with dessert, other *spumante* wines can be absolutely dry. For a light, pleasant aperitif wine in the \$10 range, try a *prosecco* from the Veneto towns of Conegliano or Valdobbiadene. Fontanafredda, from the Piedmont, makes a very fine traditional sparkling wine, and Ca’ del Bosco, in the Lombardy lake district, produces several Champagne-style bottlings of exceptional quality.

American *méthode champenoise* wines also provide both quality and value. Schramsberg, Scharffenberger, Iron Horse, Château St. Jean, Shadow Creek, and Jordan make consistently fine sparklers. Additionally, many of the famous French houses have vast vineyard holdings in California and produce sparkling wines using the same grapes and the same methods—and in some instances the same winemakers—as in Champagne. These French-Californian wines include Piper Sonoma, Mumm Napa Valley, Maison Deutz, Domaine Chandon, Roederer Estate, and Taittinger’s Domaine Carneros. And recently, the two largest Spanish *cava* producers have followed suit: Codorníu, with Codorníu Napa, and Freixenet, with Gloria Ferrer. Because of differences in soil and climate, the European and American wines will be different. I like to compare French and American wines from the same producer in side-by-side tastings to look for stylistic similarities in texture, concentration of mousse, and color density.

Although California leads the way domestically in producing quality *méthode champenoise* wines, several other states have begun to produce excellent and economical examples. Domaine Ste. Michelle in Washington State, where the northerly latitude provides both a cool climate and long, sunny days during the growing season, makes a range of good sparklers. And in the cool climate of Oregon, Argyle makes very fine sparkling wine from the classic French varietals.

Sparkling wine, straight up. For the most part, I avoid mixing sparkling wines with other beverages. Although the mimosa, which blends bubbly with orange juice, is popular for brunch and lunch, I take the purist approach, preferring to savor the wine as made by the winemaker. Likewise, I’d rather buy a demi-sec sparkling wine when I want a sweeter drink than add cassis to a dry wine to make kir royale. Since mixing in other flavors camouflages the wine, use a less expensive sparkling wine if you want to experiment for yourself with mixed drinks.

Nick Troilo owns Towne Liquors in Darien, Connecticut, where he often holds tastings on sparkling wines. He teaches wine appreciation classes and conducts wine events and seminars for major corporations.

Sparkling wine goes with...

BY ROSINA TINARI WILSON

Does sparkling wine go with everything? Many experts say yes, although I draw the line at heavy, full-flavored roasts and dense chocolate desserts, which tend to wipe out the wine's subtleties. The world of sparklers offers such a broad range of flavor, sweetness, and overall intensity, however, that you can serve them with just about anything else, from clear soup to toasted nuts.

Sparkling wine differs from still wine in a number of important ways, creating a unique set of food affinities. Because the grapes are picked early, when they're still underripe and full of natural acidity, the finished wine is both delicate and pleasantly tart. The second fermentation, which creates the bubbles, gives the wine a whole new texture. If the bubbly is then aged on the yeast that's left from its second fermentation (still wines rarely have extra yeast contact), it picks up complex flavors reminiscent of bread or pastry. And unlike many still wines, sugar is often added to sparklers—even to the driest category, known as “brut.”

TART

The high acidity of sparkling wine makes it a good match for tart foods, such as lemon sauces or citrus dressings. Acidity also works—as do the bubbles—as a palate cleanser, cutting through rich, fatty foods, such as salmon (smoked or otherwise), cream and butter sauces, and the ultimate in unctuousness, foie gras.

The “mousse,” or effervescence, of a sparkler gives the wine a mouth-feel all its own. Not only does it create a “party on your palate,” it adds enough texture so that even a simple consommé, for instance, won't seem boring.

SAVORY

Salty foods make great partners for sparklers as well, and once again, it's because of the bubbles. Salt makes a carbonated drink fizz up in your

mouth, magnifying the flavors of both food and beverage. So bring on the briny raw oysters, tangy cured olives, and, of course, the caviar.

When sparkling wines that are aged on their yeast show doughy or pastry-like flavors, they tend to bond with any kind of bread product.

“Late-disgorged” sparklers that have spent a dozen or more years on yeast (*en tirage*) show this effect even more dramatically. Croissants or muffins at brunch, croutons in a lobster bisque, and toast points for canapés all echo similar flavors in the glass.

SPICY

Slightly sweet sparklers (even those marked “brut” can have noticeable sugar) show a special affinity for both spicy and somewhat sweet foods. Just as a fruit chutney can tame the flames of a curry, an off-dry wine can balance out the heat of a mildly spicy dish. Try an inexpensive but good bubbly with sushi, Thai shrimp salad, stir-fried dishes, or even jambalaya. Don't go too high on the heat meter, though, or you'll erase some of the wine's delicacy.

SWEET

For sweet dishes, especially desserts, choose a wine with a sugar level that matches or exceeds that of the ingredients. A dish that's sweeter than a wine can throw the wine completely out of whack, making it seem sour, bitter, or tasteless.

As with all food and wine pairings, the main guideline to follow with sparkling wine and food is to match the overall body of the wine and the dish. For example, if you have a delicate chardonnay-based blanc de blancs, go with something subtle: light seafood, chicken, or perhaps pasta in a cream sauce. A bigger bubbly, such as a blanc de noirs, can handle fuller-flavored food: meaty salmon, roast turkey, pork, veal. And a dry rosé sparkler, halfway to red wine, is probably your



Sparkling wines go with more than just caviar. There are so many styles of sparkling wine that it's easy to find a perfect match for almost any dish, even slightly spicy Asian food.

best bet with red meat such as beef, lamb, or venison—but don't expect it quite to stand up as an equal partner.

Rosina Tinari Wilson is a food, wine, and travel writer and consultant. She teaches the Food & Wine Affinities course at the California Culinary Academy and has just published her first cookbook, *Seafood, Pasta & Noodles—The New Classics* (Ten Speed Press, 1994). ♦



Boiling broth seals in the juices of the meats so that they retain their flavor after hours of simmering. If the meats were added to cold water which was then brought to a boil, the juices would be more liable to leach out into the broth, leaving the meats flavorless. Here, the author adds the cotechino sausage to a small pot.

Bollito Misto— An Italian Classic

Humble cuts of meat and simple techniques make a superb dish

BY ROBERTO DONNA

I grew up in the Piedmont region of Italy, and every winter around Christmas my family and I would feast on *bollito misto*. While the name translates unromantically as “mixed boil,” *bollito misto* is more than that—it’s a delicious mixture of meats and poultry cooked in a broth that’s flavored with lots of fresh herbs and aromatic vegetables. The meats are sliced and moistened with some of the broth and more vegetables are served on the side.

When I make *bollito misto* now at my restaurants in Washington, DC, I usually serve three sauces: horseradish in vinegar, a tomato and red pepper sauce, and a garlicky green herb sauce. A few spoonfuls are the perfect contrast to the rich meats. I also serve *mostarda* fruits, usually a mixture of apricots, cherries, pears, and citron, candied in a syrup of honey and mustard powder.

WHAT’S IN THE MIX?

When deciding which meats to use, you want to think of getting a good variety of flavors, but you don’t need to worry much about the mix of textures. Once

the meats are cooked, they all have pretty much the same texture—fork-tender, melt-in-your-mouth.

The best cuts of meat to use are the cheaper, tougher cuts with lots of flavor and lots of gelatin and connective tissue. This will break down and soften during cooking and will keep the meats very moist and tender. These cuts also take on the flavors of the broth and make the meat very delicious. Expensive cuts of meat aren't appropriate because they're milder in flavor and they're too lean—they'll be dry and bland after simmering.

I use a lot of cuts in *bollito misto* that are easy to find in the grocery store, like short ribs of beef, veal breast, and bottom round of beef. Other good choices include veal shank, veal shoulder, and lamb shoulder. I also use several traditional cuts that give deliciously flavored, tender meat, but they're not always easy to find. Calf's head has very tasty, perfectly textured meat. Veal tongue has a close-grained but tender texture when simmered, and pig's foot is a good source of gelatin for the broth, giving it good flavor and body.

I use a capon (a castrated male chicken weighing about seven pounds) because the flavor is good and the bird is pretty fatty, which I like since fat is an important flavor carrier. Capon meat may not be as tender as regular chicken, but that's fine since I'm simmering it. You can use a regular chicken if you can't get capon, but be sure not to overcook it or the flavor will all cook out into the broth.

The ingredient for *bollito misto* that's worth seeking out, however, is the authentic *cotechino* sausage—a really fabulous fresh pork sausage, flavored with a traditional Italian mix of spices including marjoram, nutmeg, and cumin. If you have a local Italian store or a good butcher, try to get a real *cotechino*.

THE KEY IS GENTLE SIMMERING

The technique for cooking *bollito misto* is not really boiling, as the name implies, but instead gentle simmering, until the texture of both the meaty part and the connective tissue is extremely tender. Making *bollito misto* is just like making stock, only with stock you add your ingredients to cold water and with *bollito misto* you must add the meats to hot liquid. This is critical, because the hot liquid seals in the juices and flavors, instead of drawing them out into the broth.

Whether you cook the different meats together or separately is a question of custom and individual taste, too. Some Italian cooks simmer each type of meat separately—beef with beef, chicken with chicken. Others combine everything in one pot, which makes for an interesting broth. But if you use pork or lamb, you should cook them separately. Their strong flavors will overpower more delicate meats like chicken or veal. In my version, I'm cooking the capon separately so that I can serve a delicious, pure chicken

broth as a palate cleanser at the end of the meal. Of course there's always the question of how much you can fit into your pot. You may need to split your ingredients into a couple of batches.

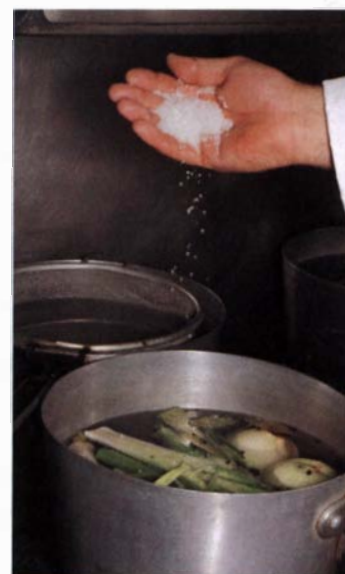
For the broth, I combine the vegetables, a nice, fat *bouquet garni* (of bay, thyme, and parsley), salt, and pepper in a large pot of water. I bring it all to a boil and let it simmer together for about 20 minutes to flavor the broth, which must be correctly seasoned, especially in terms of salt (see photo at right). The meat would taste plain in undersalted broth, and you can't really correct the flavor by sprinkling salt on the cooked meat afterward.

Next I add the meats. I keep the heat very high until the broth returns to a boil, then I turn the heat down immediately, adjusting it so the liquid just has a lively tremble on top. I don't want anything close to a rolling boil, because this will make the meat tough and the broth cloudy and greasy. I'll use the same process to cook the capon in a separate pot. I skim off the foam that forms on the top during cooking; this also keeps the broth clear and clean tasting.

Each cut of meat needs a different simmering time. Unfortunately, I can't simply tell you to cook veal for one hour and beef for two hours. You have to keep testing for doneness by piercing the meats with a skewer or sharp knife to see if they feel tender. And you have to be patient. You definitely don't want to undercook the meats for *bollito misto*, because they'll be hard and tough. The whole point of the dish is to simmer the meats until they're super-tender, super-tasty. When one cut of meat is done, take it out and keep it warm, and continue simmering the rest until it's time to remove the next. To keep cooked meats for more than about half an hour, refrigerate them.

SERVING THIS RUSTIC FARE

As for serving *bollito misto*, don't try to make this dish look glamorous. It's a rustic dish and it's meant to be



Don't skimp on the salt or your meats will taste bland. The vegetables, herbs, and spices in the cooking liquid all contribute their flavors to the final dish, so the balance of ingredients is important.



Is your pot this big? If not, don't worry—you can split up the ingredients into batches. Donna likes to cook most of his *bollito misto* ingredients together, except for strong-flavored meats like lamb and pork, which get their own pot. He cooks the capons separately, too, so he can serve the broth as a light soup.



Skim the broth frequently so it stays clear and clean tasting. Note that the ingredients in this pot are simmering but not actually boiling, which would toughen the meats and make for a cloudy broth.

presented that way. Most of the cuts of meat are irregularly shaped, so it's impossible to cut nice, neat slices from them. Just do your best to cut thin slices, cutting across the grain, and don't worry about the shape. To accompany the dish, I cook vegetables in more chicken stock to serve separately (the vegetables in the meat broth will be too overdone to serve). Choose whatever is in season and is suitable for simmering—carrots, leeks, turnips, small potatoes, cabbage, zucchini. I like to serve onions, too, but here I break with tradition and roast the onions rather than boil them. Roasting really brings out the sweetness in onions, so I prefer it that method.

This is a great meal to cook ahead because the meats will benefit from a nice rest after cooking. You could simmer the meats as much as a day ahead of time. When they're done, take them out of the broth, let them cool, and then refrigerate them overnight, covered with the cold broth. When you're ready to serve them, reheat each whole cut by simmering it in the broth again until it's warmed through, and then slice it and serve. You can make the sauces a day ahead, too, but they might separate, so be sure to stir them well before serving (see photo at right). The *mostarda* fruits can be found at Italian specialty shops.

BOLLITO MISTO

You can use whatever mix of meats and poultry that you like; just be sure the cuts have enough body and flavor to withstand long simmering. Whatever your mix, you'll want about eight pounds of meat (including the bones), plus a sausage and a chicken or capon. To drink, I recommend a Barbera or a Dolcetto; both are wonderful red wines from

the Piedmont region with enough acid to cut the richness of the meats. Serves ten to twelve.

FOR THE BROTH:

3 large onions, quartered
4 leeks, rinsed and split
4 large carrots, chopped coarse
6 large cloves garlic
2 large tomatoes, chopped coarse
4 bay leaves
4 large sprigs fresh thyme
1 small bunch fresh parsley
4 Tbs. salt
2 Tbs. whole black peppercorns

FOR THE MEATS:

2 lb. lean short ribs of beef
4 lb. bottom round of beef
1 lb. oxtail
2 lb. breast of veal, rolled and tied
1 veal tongue
1 pig's foot, parboiled for 15 min.
1 calf's head
1 cotechino sausage
1 capon or large roasting chicken

FOR THE VEGETABLE ACCOMPANIMENT:

10 to 12 medium yellow or Vidalia onions, peeled and halved
Olive oil for drizzling
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1½ lb. new or boiling potatoes, peeled
1½ lb. carrots, peeled and cut into chunks
1½ lb. leeks, split, rinsed, and cut into 3-in. chunks
Chicken stock, for simmering (optional)

Divide the broth ingredients between a pot for the capon and a pot (or pots) for the other meats. Add water to fill the pots about half way and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat slightly and simmer for 20 min. Taste the liquid to make sure the amount of salt is right. Increase the heat and bring the broth to a full boil. Add the capon and the meats to the pots and top off with more water if necessary to cover. As soon as the broth returns to a boil, adjust the heat so the liquid simmers steadily but doesn't actually boil. During cooking, skim off any scum from the top of the broth.

After about an hour, begin testing the meats. Here are some approximate cooking times: *cotechino*—1 hour; capon, veal breast, tongue, pig's foot—1½ hours; short ribs, oxtail, bottom round, calf's head—3 to 4 hours.

When a cut of meat is very tender when pierced with a knife or skewer, remove it and reserve at room temperature or in the refrigerator. When all the meats are cooked, strain both the meat broth and the capon broth and skim off as much fat as possible. Taste them; if not full-flavored enough, simmer to reduce the volume and concentrate the flavors a little.

About an hour before serving time, heat the oven to 375°F. Arrange the onions in a roasting or baking dish, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast until slightly collapsed and caramelized, about 45 min. Keep warm until time to serve.

Meanwhile, simmer the potatoes, carrots, and leeks in chicken stock or water, seasoned with salt and pepper, until just tender. Remove from the stock when done, but save the stock. Just before serving, reheat the vegetables by simmering them in a little of the reserved stock.

To serve the *bollito misto*, cut each type of meat into thin slices or small pieces, removing any bones. The pig's foot is difficult to slice, so just cut it into sections. The tongue must be peeled, using a sharp knife and your fingers, before slicing. Slice the breast meat of the capon and cut the wings, thighs, and drumsticks into portions. Arrange all the meats, sausage, and capon on a large deep,

warm platter, and pour over some hot broth. Serve the vegetables in bowls on the side, along with the roasted onions and the three sauces. If you like, serve the capon broth in little cups after finishing the *bollito misto*.

SALSA ROSSA

Yields about 2 cups.

3 lb. ripe Roma tomatoes, seeded and chopped fine
1 yellow and 1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded,
and chopped fine
1 onion, chopped fine
2 tsp. minced hot chile
1/3 cup sugar
1/4 cup white-wine vinegar
Extra-virgin olive oil

In a heavy-based saucepan, combine all ingredients except the vinegar and oil and simmer over very low heat until completely soft and the texture is like that of marmalade, about 40 min. Purée the mixture, return it to the pan, stir in the vinegar, and add salt to taste. Continue to cook another 10 to 15 min., until the mixture is quite thick. Cool.



Bright colors, bright flavors. A trio of sauces and spicy mostarda fruits all have sharp flavors that are good foils to the rich, mellow meats in bollito misto.

A plate of bollito misto is full of pure flavors and melt-in-your-mouth textures. A rustic presentation only adds to its appeal.

Just before serving, whisk in enough olive oil to loosen the texture and enrich the flavor of the sauce.

SALSA VERDE

Yields 1 1/2 cups.

1 oz. (about 2 slices) crustless white bread or roll
1/3 cup red-wine vinegar
1 large bunch Italian parsley
2 anchovies
1 to 2 cloves garlic
1 hard-boiled egg
1 tsp. capers
1 cup (approximately) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Soak the bread in the vinegar until soft and then squeeze out most of the vinegar. Combine the bread, parsley, anchovies, garlic, egg, and capers in a food processor and process using the pulse button until fairly smooth but not liquefied. Transfer to a bowl and whisk in the olive oil, drop by drop, so the sauce emulsifies. It should be thick. Season to taste.

HORSERADISH SAUCE

Yields about 2 cups.

3 cups water mixed with 3 Tbs. flour and 2 Tbs. lemon juice
1/2 lb. fresh horseradish, peeled and grated coarse
1/2 cup white-wine vinegar
1 1/2 cups extra-virgin olive oil
Salt

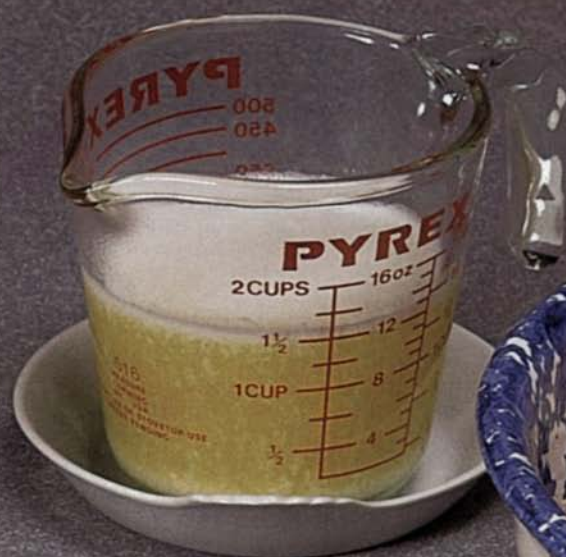
Bring the water, flour, and lemon juice to a boil in a large pan. (The flour and lemon will help keep the horseradish from turning brown.) Add the horseradish and boil 2 to 3 min. Drain, refresh under cold water, and drain again completely. Mix with the vinegar and oil and season with salt.

Roberto Donna is a chef from San Raffaele Cimena, Torino, Italy, who now owns five restaurants in Washington, DC, including I Matti Trattoria, which offers bollito misto on its winter menu. ♦



Prepping in the Microwave

Make small tasks a snap



BY JUDY RUSIGNUOLO

Sweat aromatic vegetables in the microwave instead of a skillet before adding them to stuffing, soups, or stews. Onions and garlic lose their bite after a couple of minutes in the microwave, and carrots and celery become tender and flavorful.

When asked about the prep tools I use most frequently in my kitchen, things like a food processor, a sturdy mixer, or a good set of knives immediately come to mind. It wasn't until a recent long day in my kitchen that I realized that the single tool I use the most is one that often goes unnoticed—the microwave oven. I won't say the microwave does everything well, because clearly it doesn't. The tasks I like to do in the microwave are generally those that are smaller parts of bigger processes, things that the microwave can do in a fraction of the time it would take using conventional appliances. Another benefit of the microwave is that most times the dish you use is easier to clean than the pot or skillet you would have used on the stovetop.

Prepping in the microwave does take some get-

ting used to. It's a very fast way of doing things, and so it requires your total attention and involvement in the process. Even though the tasks seem simple, they test your cooking skills. Because of the quick rate of cooking, you must constantly evaluate progress, tend foods to ensure evenness of cooking, and make decisions about when foods have reached their proper doneness. This probably sounds like more trouble than it really is. The fact is, while a watchful eye is necessary, each task on average takes no more than a few minutes to do.

You'll need to become familiar with the way your microwave oven performs. The size of your oven (compact, mid-size, full-size), its wattage (anywhere from 450 to 1,000W for noncommercial ovens), and the way in which the microwaves are distributed will

determine its cooking efficiency. Cooking times do vary from one machine to another, but when you use your microwave every day, you get in tune with how quickly it cooks.

Microwaves are attracted to certain foods—Without going into a long technical explanation of how microwaves work, it's critical to know that some foods absorb microwave energy more efficiently than others—namely, fats and sugars. Because of this, foods with a high sugar or fat content (or both) will generally cook very quickly in your microwave. On the other hand, water and other liquids don't heat up any faster in the microwave than they do on the stovetop.

COLD OR LUMPY FOODS SOFTEN QUICKLY

One of the great things a microwave oven can do is to soften foods quickly. For example, a simple thing like softening cream cheese can take an hour or more if you were to leave it on the counter to come to room temperature. And putting it in a very low oven to speed the process can easily lead to disaster, even under the most watchful eye. Using the microwave, this task can be done in just a minute or two.

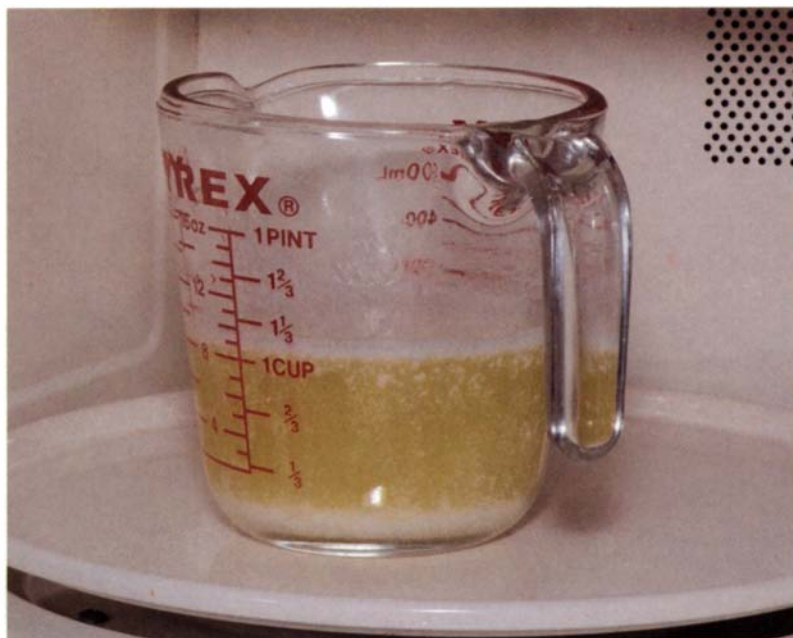
Besides softening cream cheese, the microwave is great for softening butter or peanut butter to make them more spreadable, for restoring honey that has crystallized, and for softening brown sugar that has become too hard to break apart.

Use a lower power setting, such as defrost (30%) or medium (50%), when softening foods so that the temperature of the food changes gradually. You don't want an unexpected meltdown. Foods will soften more quickly and evenly if you cut them into small pieces. I usually cut a stick of butter or a bar of cream cheese into eight pieces, and spread them out in a shallow bowl. I microwave them on defrost (30%) for one minute, check the texture by pressing with a spoon, and then continue microwaving for fifteen seconds at a time until they're softened to the consistency I want. As with all microwave cooking, the length of time it takes has much to do with the amount of food and the size of the pieces, and frequent checking is necessary to get the exact texture you want. It's important to check butter frequently, because with just a few seconds too many, it will begin to melt.

FATS MELT IN MINUTES

Because microwaves are attracted to fats and sugars, melting things like butter and chocolate is quite easy and quick. As with softening, cutting the food into small pieces will speed up the melting process. I usually melt ingredients on high power because there's a little more margin of safety than there is when softening food.

One stick (half cup) of butter melts in a minute to a minute and a half, with one stop along the way



Clarify butter quickly without the risk of burning it. Simply melt the butter in the microwave, remove it, and then wait for the milk solids to separate from the butterfat. Skim any foam from the surface and pour off the butterfat, leaving behind the milky liquid.

Tips for small tasks in the microwave

- Use glass, ceramic, or plastic containers that are approved for microwave use. Microwaves can't penetrate metal cookware—you'll get a show of fireworks rather than cooked food.
- Contrary to popular belief, cookware can become very hot in the microwave. Always use potholders when checking or removing food.
- Microwaveable glass measuring cups are very handy—they're available in a variety of sizes (from one- to eight-cup capacities), have handles for easy use, and can serve as mixing bowls when stirring in additional ingredients.
- Microwaveable glass pie plates work well for foods that need to be spread out for even cooking, such as nuts or shredded coconut.
- Ingredients right out of the refrigerator or freezer will take longer to cook than those at room temperature.
- I usually set the microwave timer for the total cooking time when I'm able to stand by and tend foods. This is more convenient than resetting the timer after each short check, but the key here is that you must stay nearby to check progress.—J.R.



Stir to prevent burning when you toast coconut, nuts, or sesame seeds in the microwave (left). Otherwise, hot spots in the microwave will overcook some parts before others have begun to brown (right).

to give it a stir. Once butter is melted, don't continue to heat it because the nonfat liquids in it will cause it to bubble up and spatter.

Clarifying butter—Making clarified butter by removing the milk solids and liquids from the butterfat is a natural for the microwave. After melting the butter (a stick of butter in a small measuring cup works well), let it stand for five minutes for the butter to separate. Skim off the foam from the top, and then carefully pour the clear butterfat into another container. Discard the milky liquid that remains on the bottom.

Melting chocolate—The microwave melts chocolate perfectly in a couple of minutes, much faster than in a double boiler, and there's no risk of water or steam splashing into the chocolate and making it seize. If I plan to add the chocolate to a recipe, I usually melt it in a custard cup. If I'm going to add other ingredients to the chocolate, I use a large bowl.

The only tricky part about melting chocolate in a microwave is that you can't tell how much it has melted by peering through the window. Chocolate retains its shape—even when melted—until it's stirred. I microwave one to two ounces of chocolate on high (100%) for one minute, take it out and stir it, and then put it back in for fifteen seconds at a time. It's important to use small increments toward the end of the melting process because chocolate can burn, even in the microwave. When melting larger amounts of chocolate, you'll need to add more time. Chopping the chocolate helps it melt more evenly.

TOAST NUTS WITHOUT HEATING UP AN OVEN

I used to hesitate before turning on a conventional oven just to toast a handful of nuts, but now I toast

them in the microwave whenever I need them. You can toast most nuts, including walnuts, pecans, almonds, and pine nuts, in a microwave. By varying the amount of cooking time, you can toast them lightly if you're using them in a dish that requires further cooking, or toast them longer to bring out their full flavor, which is especially good when using toasted nuts as a garnish.

To toast about a cup of nuts, spread them out in a single layer in a shallow bowl or a glass pie plate. Microwave on high (100%) for three to four minutes, or until they're as brown as you like them. Be sure to give them a stir every minute so that they toast evenly. You can also toast sesame seeds and coconut this way; just leave them in for less time.

SAUTEING OFF THE STOVE

"Sauté" may not be the correct term to describe cooking in the microwave, but it does describe the result I want to get when I cook aromatic vegetables—like onions, garlic, or shallots—in a little oil or butter until they're softened, tender, full of flavor, and ready to add to my simmering pot of soup or stew on the stove. A cup of coarsely chopped onion tossed in a tablespoon of oil or butter takes four to five minutes on high (100%) to become tender, while a small amount of minced shallots or garlic cooks in a minute to a minute and a half. It's a good idea to give them a stir at least once so that they cook evenly.

Judy Rusignuolo, formerly a restaurant chef and caterer, develops new products and recipes for Best Foods in New Jersey. ♦

Rich and Delicious Warm Chocolate Tarts

Less fussy to make than a soufflé, with a built-in sauce

BY MARYBETH FAMA



Intensely chocolate tart is cakey on the outside and gooey in the middle. Served in a pool of coffee-flavored crème anglaise and garnished with sweetened citrus zest and fresh raspberries, this dessert looks and tastes wonderful but is simple to make.

Served immediately from the oven, this warm chocolate tart has a cakelike exterior, a denser, moist interior, and a built-in chocolate sauce that runs from the center when you break into the tart with a fork. It's actually something between a flourless chocolate cake and a chocolate soufflé that's baked in individual tart pans. At Röckenwagner, we serve the tart sitting in a pool of thick espresso *crème anglaise*, and garnish it with sweet-

ened citrus peels. For a chocolate lover, the tart is supremely satisfying, and it's by far the best-selling dessert at the restaurant.

This dessert is very impressive, but it's fairly easy to make. The techniques involved are straightforward—beating egg yolks until thick, beating egg whites into a meringue, and gently folding them together. I like modern conveniences, and so I whip up the tarts in an electric mixer, but they're practi-

WARM CHOCOLATE TARTS

Yields 12 tarts.

13 ounces semisweet chocolate (about 3 cups, chopped)
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) butter
Pinch salt
9 egg yolks
½ cup sugar
3 egg whites

cally as easy to make by hand. All the parts can be prepared ahead of time, and the tarts baked right before serving.

START WITH GOOD CHOCOLATE

Since these tarts are mostly chocolate, you'll taste the difference if you use a good-quality chocolate. In general, French, Belgian, and Swiss chocolate have a higher cocoa-butter content and so a richer flavor and smoother texture than American chocolate. In my experience, the best is Valrhona, made in Tain l'Hermitage, France, but it isn't widely available. Callebaut chocolate from Belgium is also excellent and can be found in many specialty food stores. I am, however, a believer in making the best of what you have available to you. This recipe will turn out fine if you use ordinary chocolate chips—just add an extra ounce of butter to make the tarts richer.

The quality and freshness of all the raw ingredients, especially the eggs, is also important. The

eggs in the batter at the center of the tart aren't fully cooked, and neither are the eggs in the *crème anglaise*, so they're not heated to a temperature sufficient to kill all bacteria that get in. Also, make sure your equipment is scrupulously clean.

MAKING THE BATTER IS A SNAP

Although it's made with whipped egg whites, this tart batter is quite thick and holds up well for several hours before baking. You can make the batter and fill the tart pans up to eight hours ahead, and then refrigerate the pans until you're ready to bake and serve the tarts.

Prepare the tart pans—These tarts just don't come out well from uncoated pans, so bake the batter in four-inch, nonstick tart pans or in nonstick muffin pans. It's especially easy to get them out of nonstick tart pans that have removable bottoms. (Most Williams-Sonoma stores carry these pans. Call 800/541-1262 for a store near you). Brush each pan with melted butter and coat with flour.

Melt the chocolate—I think it's much quicker and easier to melt chocolate in a microwave than on the stove. The trick is to take the chocolate out while some of it is still hard, stir it, and let the heat from the melted chocolate finish melting the solid chocolate (see photos at left).

With a chef's knife, chop the chocolate into small pieces on a cutting board, keeping in mind that if you eat too many of the pieces, you'll alter the outcome of the recipe. Cut up the butter and put it, together with the chocolate, in a clean, dry, microwave-safe bowl (a large porcelain soup or cereal bowl is just right). Add a pinch of salt to heighten the flavor of the dish. Throwing the salt in with the chocolate is an easy way to dissolve and distribute it throughout. Microwave on high for one minute, stir, and repeat for another minute or until the chocolate seems softened but still looks somewhat chunky. Remove from the microwave and stir to distribute the heat until the chocolate is completely smooth. If you don't have a microwave, you can melt the chocolate mixture over a hot water bath. Let the chocolate mixture cool to room temperature.

Separate the eggs—This is an important step in any recipe that relies on egg whites as a leavening agent. What you want to achieve are yolks with as little white in them as possible, whites with absolutely no yolks in them (yolk contamination can ruin the "whip-ability" of your whites), and no shells (remove little bits of shell by scooping them out with a spoon). Any food or oil from your hands that comes in contact with the egg whites can sabotage the batter, so be sure to wash your hands before separating the eggs.



This chocolate is more melted than it looks. To make sure you don't scorch chocolate when melting it in a microwave, take it out and stir it every minute. Chocolate can look rock hard on the outside (A), even when it's molten inside (B).

Multi-course dessert

European chefs, and more recently chefs in this country as well, have a long tradition of offering their serious customers “dégustation” menus—large, fixed-price meals of many small courses. In the past, this meant four to six (or more) savory courses, followed by one dessert and perhaps some truffles or petits fours with the coffee. From there chefs went to offering dessert “samplers,” with a variety of desserts all on one plate to show the chef’s repertoire. The problem with this was that the chef could not choose what people ate first, so diners would head straight for the chocolate, fill up on it, overwhelm their taste buds, and be unable to appreciate the other desserts.

But in the last ten years, some chefs—including Fredy Girardet in Crisier, Switzerland, and Charlie Trotter in Chicago—have taken a new approach, offering the dessert in courses, too. An elaborate meal of eight courses doesn’t screech to a halt with one dessert; instead, it moves to a progression of four or five dessert courses with the chef in control of the diner’s experience.

The idea of a progression is important—the dessert menu is a fresh start within the meal. The first course is light, cold, and palate-cleansing, such as a small serving of sorbet or a fruited gelatin. That’s followed by a fruit cobbler, a fritter, or fresh fruit with a cookie. The courses build to a climax with the richest dessert, usually something warm and chocolate. The dessert ends with small candies, petits fours, or cookies. Most people in their right minds wouldn’t agree to eating a series of desserts, so the courses must come quickly—almost overlapping in the service—and the portions must be extremely small.

At Röckenwagner, our favorite progression goes something like this: For the first course, a



refreshing “fruit soup,” which is a shallow bowl containing a beautiful arrangement of fresh fruit slices in a thin fruit purée, with a hazelnut puff pastry crouton and a scoop of sorbet. The server pours a little Champagne over the fruit at the table. The second course is a miniature apple “pizza,” which consists of a foundation of thin puff pastry covered with a layer of almond cream, topped with thinly sliced fruit. It’s baked and served warm with a little scoop of vanilla ice cream. For the third course, we present a small version of our warm chocolate tart with the espresso sauce and citrus garnish. To finish the progression, we serve a plate of truffles along with the coffee.—M.E.

Start light and build to chocolate. A four-course dessert starts with a fruit soup (top) followed by an apple “pizza” (above left), climaxes with a miniature warm chocolate tart (not shown), and ends with a plate of truffles and cookies.

Beat the egg yolks until thick—In the bowl of an electric mixer, combine the egg yolks with all but two tablespoons of the sugar. Beat on high speed with the whip attachment for about two minutes, until the mixture lightens in color and thickens in consistency. (If you prefer, you can whip the yolks and sugar by hand with a whisk.) This is called bringing the mixture to ribbon stage because when you lift the whisk, the batter will fall in ribbons. Fold the cooled chocolate mixture into the egg yolks with a rubber spatula until the mixture is homogenous.

Whip the egg whites until soft—Add the remaining two tablespoons of sugar to the egg whites and whip at high speed just until they form soft peaks, about a minute and a half. Don’t overbeat the eggs or they’ll get dry and grainy.

Gently fold it all together—Scoop one-third of the egg whites into the chocolate mixture and, using a rubber spatula or large whisk, fold the mixture together in a circular up and down motion until the egg whites are evenly incorporated. Then add the remaining egg whites and lightly fold them in. Be

**ESPRESSO
CREME
ANGLAISE**

Yields 2 cups.

1 pint (16 ounces)
milk or heavy
cream
5 egg yolks
½ cup sugar
1 tablespoon finely
ground dark-roast
coffee beans or
2 teaspoons
instant espresso
powder

sure to use good folding technique—if you stir or fold too roughly, you'll knock the air out of the mixture, decreasing the volume of the batter and leaving you with fewer tarts than you had planned.

Fill the tart pans—Spoon the batter into the prepared tart or muffin pans so that the batter reaches about ½ inch from the top. Cover the tarts with plastic wrap and refrigerate until you're ready to bake them.

Bake the tarts—These tarts are baked quickly at a high temperature to give them a cakey exterior and a warm, runny interior. A convection oven works particularly well for getting these results, but a conventional oven does fine, too.

Heat the oven to 475°F. If you've prepared the tarts ahead of time, take them directly from the refrigerator to a baking sheet and put them in the oven. Bake them for nine minutes if the batter has



A nonstick muffin pan is a handy substitute for individual tart pans. Prepare the batter and fill the tins ahead of time, and then store in the refrigerator until you're ready to bake and serve them.



You'll be tempted to overbake the tarts, but don't. They'll still look a bit gooey when you take them out of the oven, but that way the inside will run out like chocolate sauce when you cut into it.

been chilled, but only for eight minutes if you're baking them right away and the batter is room temperature. They won't look done when you pull them out—the top may still have a spot or two of liquid batter and they'll jiggle like firm gelatin—but pull them out anyway. You want the outside of the tart to be like cake and the inside warm and runny. If you overbake them, the tart will be more cakey but still delicious. If you underbake them, the inside will be more saucy and won't be warm.

EVEN BETTER WITH COFFEE CUSTARD SAUCE

You can make this sauce up to a day ahead and keep it chilled in the refrigerator. Depending on how rich you want the sauce to be, you can make it with either milk or heavy cream. I've even made it at home with low-fat (2%) milk, with excellent results. Finely ground coffee beans speckle the sauce and give it a subtle coffee flavor. Since the chocolate supplies enough of a jolt, I use decaffeinated dark-roast coffee beans. (See ingredient list above left.)

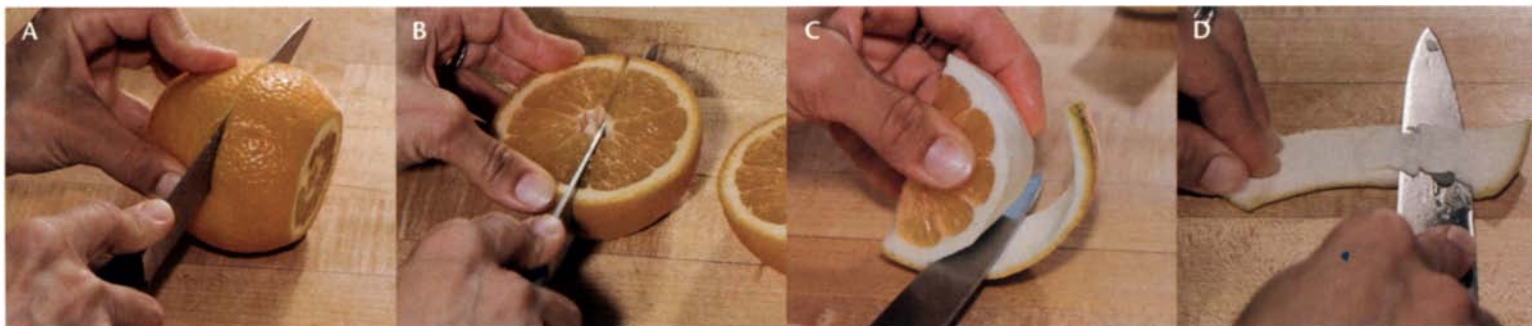
Get an ice bath ready—Once the sauce is made, you'll want to chill it quickly to prevent bacteria from multiplying. Prepare an ice bath by filling a large bowl with ice and a small amount of water and setting another bowl inside of it.

Bring the milk to a boil—Put the milk or cream in a heavy saucepan and slowly heat it until it just comes to a boil, stirring occasionally. Remove the milk from the heat and stir in the ground coffee.

Beat egg yolks until thick—Combine the egg yolks with the sugar and whisk, either by hand or in an electric mixer, until they lighten in color, about a minute.

Temper the egg mixture with the milk—With the mixer on low speed, pour half of the hot milk into the egg yolks and stir until incorporated. Then transfer all the egg-yolk mixture into the saucepan and stir thoroughly.

Heat the sauce, stirring continuously—Return the pan to the stove and slowly heat the sauce over low heat, taking care to scrape the bottom of the



Cutting citrus zest into uniform strips is easy. (A) First, cut off the stem and navel ends of the fruit, and then cut the fruit in half between the two ends. (B) Cut each half of the fruit into two semicircles. (C) Prop each quarter of fruit on the cutting board,

skin side down, and slice away the pulp and most of the white pith. (D) Lay the peel flat on the board and carefully slice away the remaining pith. When nothing is left but the colored outer rind, chop the zest into matchstick-size pieces.

CITRUS-PEEL CONFIT

Yields ½ cup.

1 lemon
1 orange
½ cup sugar
1 tablespoon light corn syrup
¼ cup water

pan as you stir (a wooden spatula with a flat edge works great for this). Heat the sauce for several minutes until it reaches the *nappe* stage—that is, until it coats the back of the wooden spatula, and when you draw your finger through the sauce, the mark doesn't fill in. This should happen just before the sauce reaches the boiling point. Don't let the sauce boil or the eggs will coagulate and you'll have lumps in the sauce.

Chill the sauce rapidly—Transfer the sauce to the ice bath to cool. You may want to strain it through a fine sieve to assure a smooth consistency, but if you've taken care not to overcook the sauce, this shouldn't be necessary.

CITRUS-PEEL GARNISH ADDS ZING

These sweet, tender strips of lemon and orange zest confit (pronounced kohn-FEE) provide a sparkle of color and flavor that contrasts with the intense chocolate of the tart. (See ingredient list above left.)

Cut off the zest—Slice off the peel from the orange and the lemon, taking care to cut away as much of the bitter, white inner rind, or pith, as possible. I find the easiest way is to first cut off the stem and navel ends, cut the fruit in half between the two ends, then cut each half into two semicircles (see photos above). Prop each quarter of fruit on the cutting board, skin side down. Hold your knife parallel to the cutting board and slice away the pulp and the pith. You'll have four neat rectangular strips of zest which you can then julienne into matchstick-size pieces.

Blanch the zest—Blanching softens the zest and removes any bitter flavor. Put the sliced zest in a saucepan of cold water, bring it to a boil, and drain. Repeat twice to thoroughly remove all bitterness.

In another saucepan, combine the sugar, corn syrup, and water and heat until the sugar dissolves, stirring occasionally. Add the blanched zest and simmer them in the syrup until they're very tender (but

not broken down) and the syrup is still runny, about 15 minutes. Let the zests cool, and then store them with the syrup in a glass jar. Just like jam, they'll keep for ages in the refrigerator.

SERVE TARTS HOT FROM THE OVEN

The tarts should be served as soon as possible after leaving the oven, so while they're baking, prepare your plates. Ladle one or two ounces of the *crème anglaise* onto each plate and drag the ladle through the sauce in a circular motion to spread it out.

Loosen the tarts, if necessary, by running a knife around the edges. Then cover the tarts with a clean plate or baking sheet, flip over the tart pan, and shake gently to release them from the pans. Place one tart, top side up, in the middle of the sauce on each plate. Drop a few strips of the citrus confit on top of the tart and serve. For a fancier presentation, add a few fresh berries and a sprig of mint to each plate, and dust the plate with powdered sugar (see photo on p. 67).

EXPERIMENTING WITH OTHER FLAVORS

You can create other versions of the warm chocolate tart by incorporating different flavors into the batter. For example, adding a couple of teaspoons of natural mint extract makes a refreshing chocolate-mint variation. Coffee lovers may want to try adding a tablespoon of finely ground espresso, or a good-quality mocha paste, for a chocolate-mocha tart. If you prefer the taste of fruit as an accent to chocolate, drop a few fresh raspberries into each tart just before baking and serve them with a tangy raspberry sauce instead of the *crème anglaise*.

Marybeth Fama began cooking professionally to support herself while studying at the University of Chicago, and restaurants have been her life ever since. Fama co-owns Röckenwagner and Fama, both in Santa Monica, California, with Hans Röckenwagner. ♦



Keep your thumb on the cork to avoid accidents.



Hold the cork in place while you turn the bottle for a smooth opening.

Opening Bubbly

Sparkling wine has five to six atmospheres of pressure (approximately 90 pounds per square inch) packed within each bottle, about the same pressure as a bus tire. Therefore, it's best—and safest—to handle a bottle of bubbly with great care, being aware of its potential danger.

Before opening a bottle of sparkling wine, make sure it's properly chilled, at least 45°F. To do this, put the unopened bottle in a bucket half filled with ice and half with water for at least half an hour before you plan to open it. Make sure the bottle hasn't been handled roughly before serving. You don't want to agitate the carbon dioxide in the bottle.

When you're ready to open the bottle, remove it from the ice bucket. Dry the sides and bottom with a towel and then put the bottle on a solid surface. Peel off the foil, starting below the wire cage. If you're right-handed, hold your left thumb on the cap of the bottle. With your right hand, turn the wire ring counterclockwise (usually six turns). Loosen the wire cage without letting go of the cap. Don't lean over the bottle, and be sure the bottle isn't pointed at anyone else or at anything breakable. Your thumb won't hold back the cork if it decides to come out early, but it will let you know if it starts to move soon enough for you to avert an accident.

Remove the wire cage. Hold the cork firmly in your left hand and the base of the bottle in your right. Tilt the bottle to a 45° angle and make sure that the neck isn't pointing at any person or breakable object.

Since the strength and firmness of your grip is in your right hand, you should turn the bottle, not the cork. Turn the bottle counterclockwise until the cork begins to twist free. The cork should be released with a hiss rather than a pop; you don't want to lose any of those precious bubbles.

At this point, the wine is ready to be served. Never hide the label of the bottle with your hand or a towel while pouring: let your guests know what great sparkling wine you're serving. Pour the wine slowly. If you pour too fast, the mousse will overflow. (If the glass isn't squeaky clean, there will be no mousse at all.) Fill the glass only about half way. If the bottle isn't empty, return it to the ice bucket. Cheers!

—Roger Dagorn, the sommelier at *Chanterelle* in New York City, is a past president of the New York Sommelier Society.

Egg Safety

Combating the bacterial organisms salmonella is an important part of safe food handling. Because salmonella needs a moist, protein-rich, low-acid food to survive, eggs are very fertile ground for its growth. So how do we continue to prepare eggs and egg-based dishes without turning our kitchens into food laboratories? By understanding salmonella and by practicing good handling techniques, you can greatly increase egg safety.

HOW DOES SALMONELLA GROW?

Food scientists estimate that 1 in 1,000 eggs actually contains the salmonella bacteria inside the shell, but this doesn't mean we have only a .1% chance of getting sick from eggs. The bacteria can also come from improperly cleaned equipment, the outside of the eggshell, or the cook's hands. A cook can be a carrier of the bacteria without being ill.

While there's no precise dosage a person must ingest, a significant colony of salmonella bacteria is needed to cause illness, and several conditions must exist for salmonella to cause food-borne illness. First, the food must be contaminated with the bacteria; second, the food must be hospitable to bacterial growth; and finally, the food must sit in the temperature danger zone (see below) for more than two hours to give the bacteria a chance to multiply.

HOW CAN YOU MINIMIZE RISK?

Understanding how to inhibit bacterial growth can greatly minimize the risk of food-borne illness. Salmonella multiplies by division. Under favorable conditions, a single bacterium will become millions in six hours. Like all bacteria, salmonella will survive and grow in temperatures ranging from 40° to 140°F, but it thrives and reproduces rapidly at or near body temperature (98.6°). Bringing eggs to 145° for 15 seconds will definitely kill bacteria, but there are many dishes (homemade mayonnaise, for instance) that require raw or barely cooked eggs. While this means that there's no way to completely eliminate the risk in these foods, bacterial growth is significantly slower at the low and high ends of the temperature spectrum. This means that controlling the temperature of egg-rich foods is the best way to prevent salmonella-related food-borne illness.

Start by buying only refrigerated eggs and keep them cold until needed.

Never separate whites from yolks by passing the yolk between halves of the shell; instead, use an egg separator or a spoon to reduce contact between the egg and the outer surface of the shell. Yolks present more of a problem than whites, as the whites contain an enzyme called lysozyme, which actually inhibits bacterial growth. Thus, meringue is less susceptible to contamination than mayonnaise.

Once prepared, serve egg dishes imme-



HOLIDAY CHOCOLATE BUTTER COOKIES

½ cup sugar	1 teaspoon almond extract
¾ cup LAND O LAKES® Butter, softened	1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
1 egg yolk	¼ cup unsweetened cocoa

Heat oven to 375°. In large bowl combine all ingredients *except* flour and cocoa. Beat at medium speed until light and fluffy (2–3 min.). Gradually add flour and cocoa until well mixed (2–3 min.). Shape rounded teaspoonfuls as desired (1" balls, 2"–3" logs, balls flattened, balls with indentations, etc.) or use cookie press. Place 1" apart on cookie sheets. Bake for 7–9 min. or until set. Cool. Decorate with melted chocolate chips, melted almond bark, nuts, colored sugars, candied fruit, candies, maraschino cherries, etc. YIELD: 3 dozen.

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diately and discard leftovers. When cooking eggs alone (frying, poaching, etc.), the whites should be set and the yolks heated through and beginning to thicken.

Cold or raw preparations, such as homemade mayonnaise, should be kept cold. Acids also inhibit bacterial growth, so a healthy dose of lemon juice or vinegar will make a less favorable environment for bacteria. Warm preparations should be heated rapidly to as high a temperature as possible without ruining the dish. The most problematic egg preparations are hollandaise-type sauces. When made properly, these sauces are at an ideal temperature for salmonella growth (100° to 110°).

I continue to prepare some of these "hazardous" foods (although not as often as I used to) while remaining mindful of proper handling. At home, I'm careful to use fresh, refrigerated eggs. I clarify the butter and get it as hot as possible without curdling the yolks, serve the sauce immediately, and throw out leftovers.

Many commercial operations have

converted to pasteurized eggs, which come in many varieties (as whole eggs, yolks only, and whites only). These can be convenient for large production, but certainly do not eliminate the need for safe handling. You should note that most food-borne illness occurs in commercial operations, not at home. This is because commercial kitchens prepare large batches, frequently pooling eggs, thus dramatically increasing the odds of infection. Food is prepared and kept warm or at kitchen temperature and often reheated or reused for more than one meal service. At home, we generally cook smaller amounts and serve food immediately.

It's important to understand that some people are more susceptible to infection than others and should therefore be more conservative. Particularly at risk are infants, the elderly, and immunocompromised people.

—Molly Stevens teaches *Food Theory and Sanitation* at the New England Culinary Institute, Montpelier, Vermont. She was assisted by Clem Nilan, also of NECI.

Saucing with Coulis

The full-flavored yet light-bodied sauces known as coulis (koo-LEE) have become standards in the contemporary cook's repertoire. The term *coulis* comes from the French verb *couler*, meaning "to run." Usually made from fruits or vegetables, this simple sauce should be thin enough to pour and is perfect as a garnishing sauce.

Saucing dishes such as grilled meats, vegetable terrines, and soufflés with a savory coulis adds complexity to both the presentation and the taste. A coulis can also be used as a component to other recipes. A sweet coulis is a perfect base for sorbets, mousses, and ice creams.

Soft fruit, such as berries, melon, and papaya, can be puréed as is. Firm-fleshed fruits or those that discolor (pears, for instance) should be poached in a simple syrup made from sugar and water in equal amounts by weight. Poaching before puréeing softens the flesh and preserves the color of the fruit. Most vegetables need slow, moist cooking (such as

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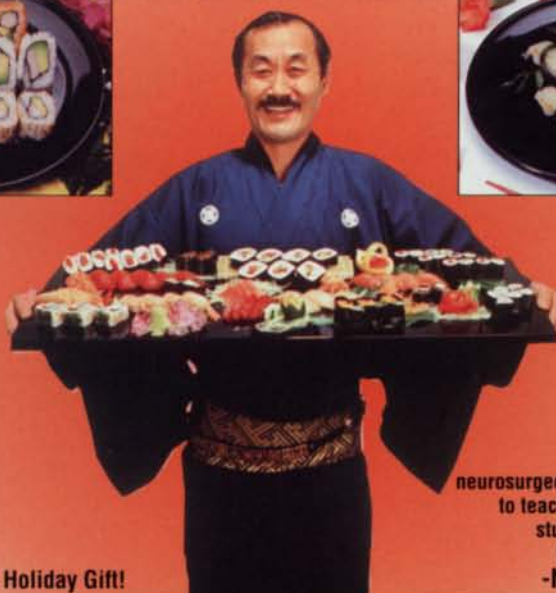
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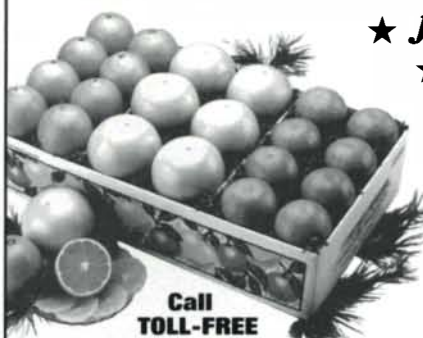
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braising) before they'll yield a purée with deep, satisfying flavor. Almost any vegetable, including tomatoes, red peppers, leeks, and carrots, will lend itself to making a coulis. Starchy vegetables, however, don't have the natural juices needed for a flavorful sauce.

Given its supporting role, coulis is most often simply seasoned. While herbs and liqueurs make nice additions to a coulis, often all that's called for is salt and pepper for savory sauces, sugar and a touch of lemon juice for sweet coulis.

To make a coulis, purée the prepared fruits or vegetables using a food processor, blender, or food mill. If the purée needs sweetening, stir in some simple sugar syrup, which will dissolve more easily than straight granulated sugar. Alternatively, use either superfine or confectioners' sugar—or even honey—as a sweetener.

To remove seeds, use a fine conical strainer, also known as a *chinois mouseline*. In addition to having an exceptionally fine mesh, the *chinois mouseline* is efficient because its shape allows the pulp



Photo: Ruth Lively

Press every last drop out of your berries for a delicious raspberry coulis.

to collect in the pointed bottom of the sieve. When the pulp has settled, you can easily press out the last bit of juice with a small ladle.

These simple sauces are perfect for adding a dressy touch to desserts or extra flavor to a savory dish. This caramelized

onion coulis is great when stirred into the pan juices of roasted pork or served with crispy potatoes.

CARAMELIZED ONION COULIS

Yields about 1½ cups.

1 small leek
1 Tbs. butter
1 Tbs. olive oil
3 medium onions, sliced thin
3 shallots, sliced thin
1 cup chicken stock
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Remove the roots and green top of the leek. Cut the remaining white part of the leek into thin slices and soak for 2 to 3 min. in cold water to remove sand. Drain the water and rinse the leeks to remove any remaining sand or dirt.

Heat the butter and oil in a sauté pan. Sauté the onions, shallots, and leek over low heat until they turn a deep golden brown, about 30 min. Deglaze the pan with the chicken stock and boil for a few minutes to reduce the liquid slightly. Purée the mixture and season to taste with salt and pepper. Pass the coulis through a fine strainer; quite a bit of pulp will be left in the *chinois*. Add more stock if the coulis is too thick.

—Val Cipollone is a cookbook editor at Carroll & Brown Publishers, London. ♦



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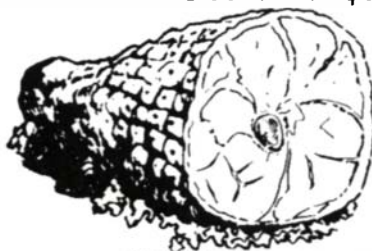
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Making Baked Goods Rise on Cue with Chemical Leavens

BY ANNE GARDINER & SUE WILSON



Simple but effective chemical leavens.

Baking soda combined with an acid, like cream of tartar, produces gas that leavens batters. Baking powder contains both an acid and an alkali and needs only to be moistened to work.

A thick, lumpy batter becomes plump muffins. Cream puffs balloon to prodigious heights. Lumps of bread dough stretch into fat loaves. We garner great pleasure from the rising of batters and doughs. In fact, one of the indicators of successful baking is the amount of “lift” we create.

Baked goods rise by the action of a leaven that produces large volumes of gas. When trapped inside a batter or dough, the gases produced by the leaven push upward, stretching the dough’s cell walls until they’re fragile and tender. As the batter or dough increases in volume, it also changes in texture, as a myriad of gas bubbles travel through the dough, creating a honeycomb of air pockets.

While gases lift and hold the dough high, the heat of the oven is crucial for setting its framework. Heat causes starch granules in the flour to gelatinize and proteins in the eggs to coagulate, reinforcing the gluten strands to form the dough’s structure.

TRADITIONAL LEAVENS—AIR, STEAM, AND CARBON DIOXIDE

The three important natural leavens, as old as the process of baking itself, are air, steam, and carbon dioxide. We add air to

batters and doughs by creaming, whipping, beating, folding, and kneading. Air by itself, though, doesn’t have the leavening potential of steam or carbon dioxide.

Steam builds as surplus liquid in batters and doughs is heated during baking. Because all baking contains moisture, steam is part of all leavening, but in some recipes—popovers, for example—steam is the primary leaven.

The third natural leaven, carbon dioxide, has traditionally been formed by using yeast. These single-cell members of the fungus family thrive in warm, moist environments in which they have food—the carbohydrates in the dough—and oxygen. As yeast cells grow, they slowly give off carbon dioxide as a byproduct of their normal metabolic processes. Because this fermentation process is fairly slow, doughs using yeast as the leaven must be strong and resilient, with a well-developed gluten structure, to contain the gas created during long periods of rising.

Natural leavens aren’t easy to tame.

In the past, baking that depended on air, steam, or yeast for leavening was inconsistent at best—sometimes the dough rose, sometimes it didn’t. The many variables, such as the right mixing technique or the vitality of the yeast, weren’t easy to predict or control. The introduction of chemical leavening agents, first baking soda and then baking powder, revolutionized the making of cakes, cookies, and breads.

CREATING CARBON DIOXIDE WITH ACIDS AND ALKALIS

When an alkaline substance is combined with an acid, the two form carbon dioxide, along with water and a type of salt. Though carbon dioxide is just a byproduct of this basic chemical reaction, it’s the component we value in baking. Unlike yeast, which produces carbon dioxide slowly, chemical leavening agents react

quickly to produce carbon dioxide. This speed makes chemical leavening agents ideal for lifting thin batters and light doughs not suited to yeast. The gas doesn’t function on its own, however. Carbon dioxide collects in and enlarges the air cells already present in a batter. This underscores the importance of techniques that add air to batters, such as creaming and beating.

ALKALINE BAKING SODA NEEDS AN ACID

Baking soda, first used in the early 1800s, is a powder of alkaline crystals of sodium bicarbonate. It rapidly produces carbon dioxide when it comes into contact with moisture and an acid. Recipes using baking soda, therefore, must always include some acidic ingredients like molasses, buttermilk, sour milk, yogurt, tart fruits, or fruit juices. Honey and cocoa are also acidic, though not *Dutch-processed* cocoa, which has been treated with sodium carbonate to reduce its acidity.

Since the levels of acidity in many ingredients vary, a perfect balance of acid and baking soda is difficult to achieve, so the texture of a baked good may differ slightly from time to time. If the amount of acidity in the recipe’s ingredients is insufficient to neutralize the quantity of baking soda, the batter remains alkaline. This results in a coarse texture because alkalinity slows down the speed at which proteins in the batter coagulate as they cook, leaving time for carbon dioxide bubbles to pool together and create a coarse crumb. An alkaline batter also tends to have a soapy flavor, and it may be slightly yellow, as alkali affects the pigments in flour. Chocolate cake turns a reddish hue, and blueberries may end up green.

Too much acid is equally undesirable because the structure of the baked good will set before the leaven has done all its work, yielding a heavy product with a

dense crumb. However, a batter that's just *slightly* acidic has the advantage of being sweet, fine in texture, and slightly whiter in color than a neutral batter. A well-balanced combination of baking soda and acid yields one of the most tender crumbs.

BAKING POWDER IS A SELF-CONTAINED LEAVEN

Baking powder, marketed as early as 1853 in the United States, is simply baking soda combined with an acid ingredient. It also contains cornstarch or calcium carbonate to stabilize the powder so that it won't react during storage. The added stabilizer also enables manufacturers to standardize the leavening power between brands so that recipes work no matter what brand of baking powder you use. With this leavening agent, rising power doesn't vary with the sourness of milk or the ripeness of fruits.

Cream of tartar, derived from tartaric acid (one of the organic acids found in grapes), was the acid constituent used in the original baking powders. Baking powders using baking soda and cream of tartar are called *single-acting* because leavening begins as soon as the baking powder is moistened. In 1860, the respected English cookbook author Mrs. Beeton cautioned cooks that "it is very necessary to get the loaves into the oven with the greatest despatch, for baking powder very soon loses its virtue." While today virtue may have slightly different connotations, the early tartrate baking powders released most of their carbon dioxide in the first two minutes of mixing. As few of us are that speedy, it isn't surprising that single-acting baking powders have

BAKING POWDER EQUIVALENTS

<i>Baking soda</i>	+	<i>Acidic ingredients</i>	=	<i>Baking powder</i>
¼ teaspoon	+	½ cup sour milk, buttermilk, yogurt, applesauce, or mashed banana	=	1 teaspoon
¼ teaspoon	+	½ teaspoon cream of tartar	=	1 teaspoon*

*If you're caught without baking powder, this is the early tartrate version.

generally disappeared from the market.

In Canada, single-acting baking powders are common, but contain phosphate powders instead of tartrate. Phosphate powders release carbon dioxide somewhat more slowly than tartrate salts do, but they're still capable of reacting almost completely at room temperature. Generally, these baking powders work best with speedy mixing and immediate baking.

Double-acting baking powder usually contains two acid components. A phosphate powder immediately produces carbon dioxide when it dissolves during mixing. The second acid component, often sodium aluminum sulfate, combines with water to form sulfuric acid. This in turn reacts with baking soda in the oven to form carbon dioxide. The two separate reactions allow extended preparation time and are well suited to products that chill before baking. Some cooks notice a bitter aftertaste, particularly if the recipe isn't highly spiced. This is due to the penetrating flavor of the sulfate residue left by the reaction. Some baking powders contain a calcium ion source, such as calcium acid phosphate, which al-

leviates this bitter aftertaste. Double-acting baking powders make doughs that are slightly more alkaline than both the old tartrate powders and the new phosphate powders.

WHY USE BOTH?

Some recipes call for baking soda *and* baking powder. You'll notice that these recipes have some acidic ingredients in them, perhaps buttermilk, yogurt, or fruit, but just enough to balance the baking soda. The problem is that the amount of carbon dioxide created by the baking-soda-acid reaction isn't enough to leaven the amount of batter in the recipe. Baking powder adds the necessary extra leavening.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Generally, one to two teaspoons of baking powder lifts one cup of flour. The amount varies according to what's in the batter and how it's assembled. Batters with a lot of air beaten into them, especially those that have whipped egg whites folded in, will need less leavening than batters that are barely mixed. Batters and doughs containing high proportions of tenderizing agents, such as fat and sugar, will also need less leavening because the weaker gluten allows the dough to stretch and rise more easily.

On the other hand, soupy batters, such as pancake batter, need more leavening because the carbon-dioxide bubbles escape easily. Dense whole-grain batters and those laden with fruit also need more baking powder for lift.



Use baking soda when you have acidic ingredients in your batter. Properly balanced in a recipe, molasses, honey, yogurt, buttermilk, mashed bananas, lemon juice, or applesauce will neutralize baking soda and produce a tender crumb.

Anne Gardiner and Sue Wilson teach and write about the chemistry of cooking in Vancouver, British Columbia. Their column, "The Inquisitive Cook," appears weekly in several Canadian newspapers. ♦

In this department, we show off the work of cooks who are good at showing off their food. The featured cook selects a few signature dishes and explains how each one is assembled and presented.

High Style

BY ALFRED PORTALE



Shellfish Bouillabaisse. This Gotham Bar & Grill classic (above) is served in an oversized soup plate. I craft beautifully colored and textured shellfish into a tower that's quite stable, despite its precarious appearance. Four halved new potatoes sit in the center of the soup plate with giant prawns balancing on top. Mussels, squid, sea scallops, littleneck clams, and lobster form a pyramid above the prawns. A spectacular langoustine crowns the dish. Aromatic tomato broth, scented with saffron and made from a reduction of shellfish and vegetables, is ladled around the base of the structure.



Muscovy Duck Breast, Baby Bok Choy, Ginger, Napa Cabbage & Chinese Spices. The duck breasts are scored, seasoned liberally with Chinese five-spice powder, sliced thin, and served rare. I fan the sliced duck in an overlapping pattern across the bottom half of the plate (above) and spoon a rich, deeply flavored duck stock reduction onto the meat and around the plate. The Asian greens—including blanched baby bok choy (whose outer leaves have been wrapped around the bulb to secure the

base), snow peas, napa cabbage, and cilantro—create a dramatic bouquet in the center of the plate. Scallion reeds protrude from the bok choy, casting swordlike shadows on the plate. Fried lotus chips face the diner from atop the bok choy.

Seared Yellowfin Tuna, Rosemary, Savory, Pappardelle & Caponata. To create a spiralling structure in this herbaceous dish (right), I bathe the long, flat pappardelle pasta in a savory herb butter and twirl it around a large two-pronged fork. I arrange the rare, sliced tuna

around the pasta in an overlapping pattern. A dollop of caponata balances the tuna on the other side of the plate. Fragrant herbs, including savory, flowering thyme, chervil, chives, and chive blossoms, weave through the pappardelle spiral. Beautiful sprigs of the herbs top the pasta. A rich red-wine sauce is dotted on the plate.



Alfred Portale is the chef/owner of Gotham Bar & Grill in New York City. ♦

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Low-Fat Cookbooks

Everyone, it seems, wants to be on a low-fat diet these days. Middle-aged baby boomers just beginning to face their own mortality, and seniors, too, hope that by eating less fat they can live longer and more active lives. Even children are eschewing quarter-pounders for veggie-burgers, if only to save the planet.

Cookbook publishers are responding to the growing demand by filling their lists with low-fat cookbooks for every audience. There are books specifically for diabetics, and others with recipes that claim to prevent heart disease. Restaurant chefs are publishing their low-fat recipes and celebrities are weighing in (so to speak) with their personal weight-loss guides.

Since low-fat recipes have a reputation of being low in flavor, too, I've looked through some of the cookbooks currently on the market in search of some low-fat food that isn't so hard to swallow.

Methodist Hospital in Houston, Texas, has proven that it doesn't have to be that way. Although the restaurant was eliminated from the hospital's budget in 1993, its cookbook—with recipes like Whole Fillet of Beef with Brandy Reduction Sauce, Blueberry Cobbler, and Sesame Chicken Fingers LeBlanc with Two Dipping Sauces—continues to win converts to low-fat cooking.

Their Almond Skordalia, served with grilled swordfish, is one of the richest-tasting low-fat sauces I've ever encountered, and the chocolate brownies are incredibly fudgy. I was delighted to find recipes for ethnic dishes, like the Grilled Thai Chicken Salad, that don't require hard-to-find ingredients.

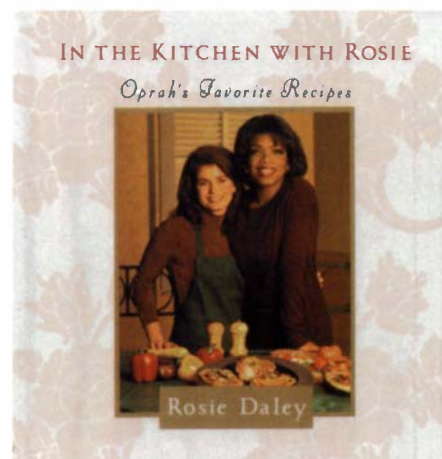
The book's main weakness is that the recipes haven't been modified for home cooks. Because the recipes originated in a restaurant kitchen, many require last-minute preparation. Others call for complicated sauces and stocks, such as soubise and demi-glace, that must be prepared in advance. But if you treat this as a special-occasion cookbook, you probably won't mind the fuss. And although you don't need to be a professional cook to prepare these recipes, some cooking experience is a must.

There are no photographs, but the book does include hints for shopping and making substitutions, cooking and preparation tips, presentation ideas, and information about the minimal equipment needed for low-fat cooking. There's a rather scientific treatise on why you should eat low-fat foods and information on how to use the nutrition analyses to integrate the recipes into a healthful eating plan.

***In the Kitchen with Rosie—Oprah's Favorite Recipes*, by Rosie Daley.** KNOPF, 1994.

\$14.95, HARDCOVER; 129 PP. ISBN 0-679-43404-6.

Since the late 1980s, when she lost 67 pounds on a liquid diet, Oprah Winfrey's weight loss—and gain and loss again—has been the topic of seemingly endless media attention. Her recent loss of 70 pounds, attributed to a strict low-fat



diet and exercise regimen, has been heralded with the publication of this book by Rosie Daley, Winfrey's private chef. And, it appears, the whole world wants to know what Winfrey eats for dinner. Her publisher estimates 7 million copies of the book will be in print by the end of the year.

Frankly, I can't understand all the fuss.

The book gets off to a bad start when it promises low-fat recipes that taste as good as the high-fat ones they try to imitate. Most of the recipes taste just fine, but no one would mistake them for anything but diet food. The breaded and baked chicken was tasty (though the technique takes some practice), but it doesn't, as Winfrey says, come close to tasting fried. I like Daley's Mock Caesar Salad with a soy and lemon dressing, but except for Parmesan cheese and romaine lettuce, it doesn't in any way resemble a true Caesar salad.

I sampled just one dessert, a heavy and dull-tasting Sweet Potato Pie that didn't leave me craving more. Perhaps the Chocolate Tofu Cake, Fruit Kebabs, or one of the other recipes in this chapter would be better, but frankly none tempted me.

The pink-rose background on the cover is a motif that runs throughout the book. It's very pretty but rather precious. The book looks better suited for a bedside table than a working kitchen. And the small, square format means that a single recipe can run on for two or three pages, making it necessary to leaf back and forth between instructions and ingredients.

Many boxes of helpful information are sprinkled throughout the book, including tips on substituting chicken stock for oil in a sauce, and instructions for roasting peppers and soaking dried mushrooms. And if you care to carve a rose from a

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ANTONIO M. GOTTO, JR., M.D., D.PHIL.
FOREWORD BY MICHAEL E. DEBAKEY, M.D.
AUTHORS OF *THE LIVING HEART DIET*

WITH
HELEN ROE, M.S., R.D./L.D., AND THE STAFF OF THE CHEZ EDDY RESTAURANT
PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED AS *THE CHEZ EDDY DINING HEART COOKBOOK*

***The Living Heart Cookbook*, by Antonio M. Gotto Jr., with Helen Roe & the staff of the Chez Eddy Restaurant.** FIRESIDE, 1991. \$14. SOFTCOVER; 348 PP. ISBN 0-671-88388-7.

Gourmet hospital food may sound like an oxymoron, but the staff of Chez Eddy, the now-defunct restaurant at the

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radish, you can learn about it here. There are a few photos, too: some of the food and some of Daley at work.

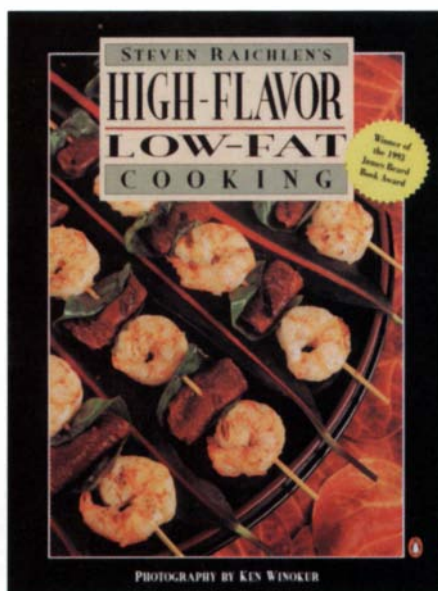
While this book may hold some appeal to die-hard Winfrey fans, people interested in good food may want to look elsewhere.

High-Flavor, Low-Fat Cooking, by Steve Raichlen. PENGUIN BOOKS, 1994. \$18.95, SOFTCOVER; 256 PP. ISBN 0-14-024123-X.

If you think low-fat food has to be bland, you haven't cooked from this book. The vibrant flavors are taken from Asian, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern cuisines. In fact, folks with milder palates may find some of the food—like the Hot & Sour Stir-Fry—a little too vibrant, but I liked it.

Just looking at the colorful food in the photographs of this book made me hungry. And I was pleased to discover that everything tastes as good as it looks.

In his introduction, author Steven Raichlen says he wanted to produce tasty, full-flavored, deeply satisfying food with a minimum of fat. He didn't set out



to write a diet book, but the recipes can help you lose weight, if that's your goal.

There are recipes here for every taste, including a spicy cabbage salad that I've often served to company, Fettuccine with Wild Mushroom Sauce, Turkey Taquitos with Salsa Verde, and even Banana Cream

Pie. And these aren't just skimpy diet plates that leave you craving seconds. The recipes are for large portions that manage to maintain low-fat and -calorie counts. There are also recipes for seasonings and marinades that cooks can use for improvising low-fat dishes of their own.

According to the author, all the recipes were tested both by himself and by his publisher, and it shows. Every recipe I tried worked well, although some used terms that may be too technical for novice cooks. Others call for techniques (such as "refresh under cold water") that are never described. Many of the exotic ingredients, such as galangal, soba noodles, and black sesame seeds, may be difficult for some readers to find. To help, Raichlen offers substitutes, a glossary describing ingredients, and mail-order sources.

The Joslin Diabetes Gourmet Cookbook, by Bonnie Sanders Polin & Frances Towner Giedt, with the Nutrition Services Staff at Joslin Diabetes Center. BANTAM BOOKS, 1993. \$24.95, HARDCOVER; 509 PP. ISBN 0-553-08760-6.

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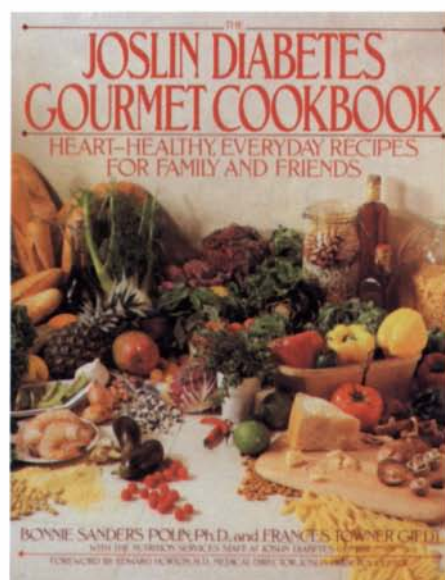
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Although it was written specifically for diabetics, this book will appeal to anyone on a low-fat diet. The recipes here, like the one for a light and refreshing Lemon Sponge Pudding, are some of the best low-fat food I've ever tasted.

There are many ethnic offerings—



everything from Irish Oatmeal Scones, Easy Microwaved Lemon Risotto, and Chinese Steamed Whole Fish—as well as more traditional recipes, such as Peppers Stuffed with Barley & Basil and Vegetable Medley Pasta Salad. There are no photographs in this book, but the recipes are clearly laid out and easy to follow. Chicken Vindaloo is colorful and pleasantly spicy, and I particularly liked the fresh tarragon dressing on the Broccoli & Cauliflower Salad.

The authors, both diabetic, are quite knowledgeable about the health risks and diet concerns of diabetics, including the need to lose or maintain weight to manage the condition.

Aside from the recipes, there's a simple yet scientific explanation of diabetes, as well as a discussion of low-fat and low-sodium cooking tips, and a list of pantry necessities and cooking equipment to aid in healthful cooking.

Deborah Hartz is the food editor of the Sun-Sentinel, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. ♦

OTHER LOW-FAT COOKBOOKS OF INTEREST:

500 Fat-Free Recipes, by Sarah Schlesinger. Villard Books, 1994. \$23, hardcover; 442 pp. ISBN 0-679-41589-0.

Healthy Cooking for Two, by Brenda & Angela Shriver. The Summit Group, 1994. \$14.95, softcover; 387 pp. ISBN 1-56530-080-7.

Healthy Gourmet Cookbook, by Pamela Shelton Johns & Mary Abbot Hess. Harper Collins, 1994. \$45, hardcover; 224 pp. ISBN 0-00-255373-2.

The Low-Fat, Good Food Cookbook, by Martin & Terri Katahn. W. W. Norton, 1994. \$9.95, softcover; 416 pp. ISBN 0-393-31149-X.

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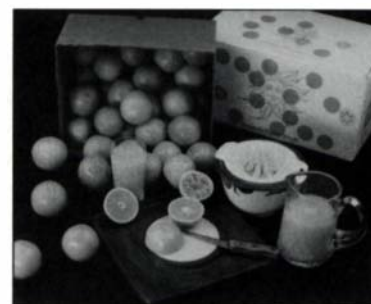
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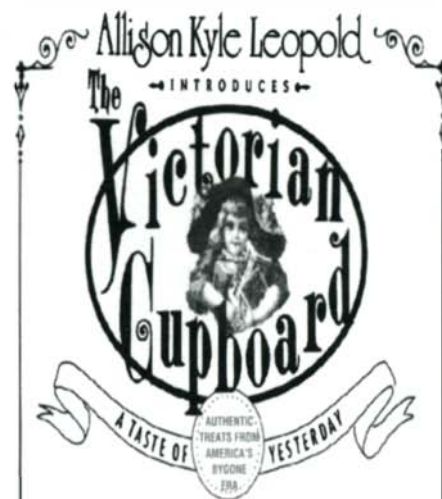
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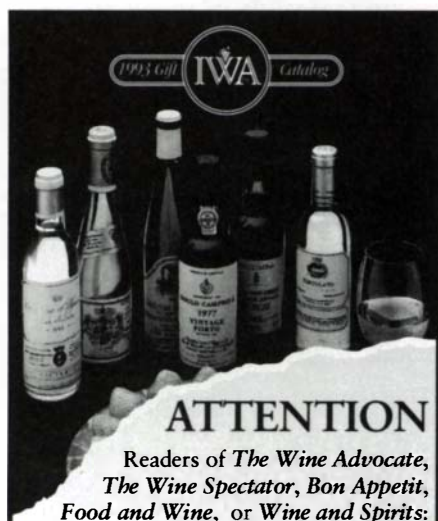
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Vanilla

Richly aromatic, mellow, and sweet, the taste of vanilla is more complicated than the expression “plain vanilla” would have you believe. Expert tasters use terms usually reserved for wine—words like woody, flowery, chocolate-like, with a hint of leather—to describe vanilla. And well they should. Like wine, vanilla is the result of a carefully cultivated crop, slowly processed to produce an intoxicating liquid.

Vanilla beans are the fruit of a striking yellow-green orchid. The flowers bloom once a year for just a few hours on vines that grow up to fifty feet high. Workers pollinate the blossoms by hand, pressing the male anther and the female stigma together in a process known as *le mariage de vanille*. Each fertilized blossom then produces a single bean. At harvest (eight to nine months after pollination) the beans look like long, green string beans. They are only partially ripened and have no taste or aroma. A yellowish tint at the tip of the bean indicates that it’s ready to be picked. The point at which vanilla beans are harvested is crucial because most of the chemicals that make up the flavor are produced just before the yellowish tint appears. Beans that are picked prematurely never develop a full vanilla flavor, no matter how carefully they’re processed. If the beans stay on the vine too long, however, they may crack, greatly reducing their value.

Vanilla beans develop their distinctive flavor during a process known as curing. During the curing, the beans are heated to break down complex substances within the bean that then develop into glucose, vanillin, and more than 250 other volatile aromatic substances. Different vanilla-producing regions have developed their own curing techniques. Some producers begin the process by dipping the beans in boiling water to “kill” them, which stops any further ripening. Others skip this step, spread the beans on mats, and lay them out in the sun to bake. Still others warm their beans in ovens instead of in the sun, insisting that this gives them more control over the curing process. At night, workers wrap the beans in wool blankets and store them in boxes to

“sweat.” This routine is repeated for several weeks until the beans soften, shrivel, and eventually turn black. Then the beans dry in the shade for two to three months. When the curing is complete, beans are graded for quality according to their length, plumpness, color, shape, and degree of moistness.

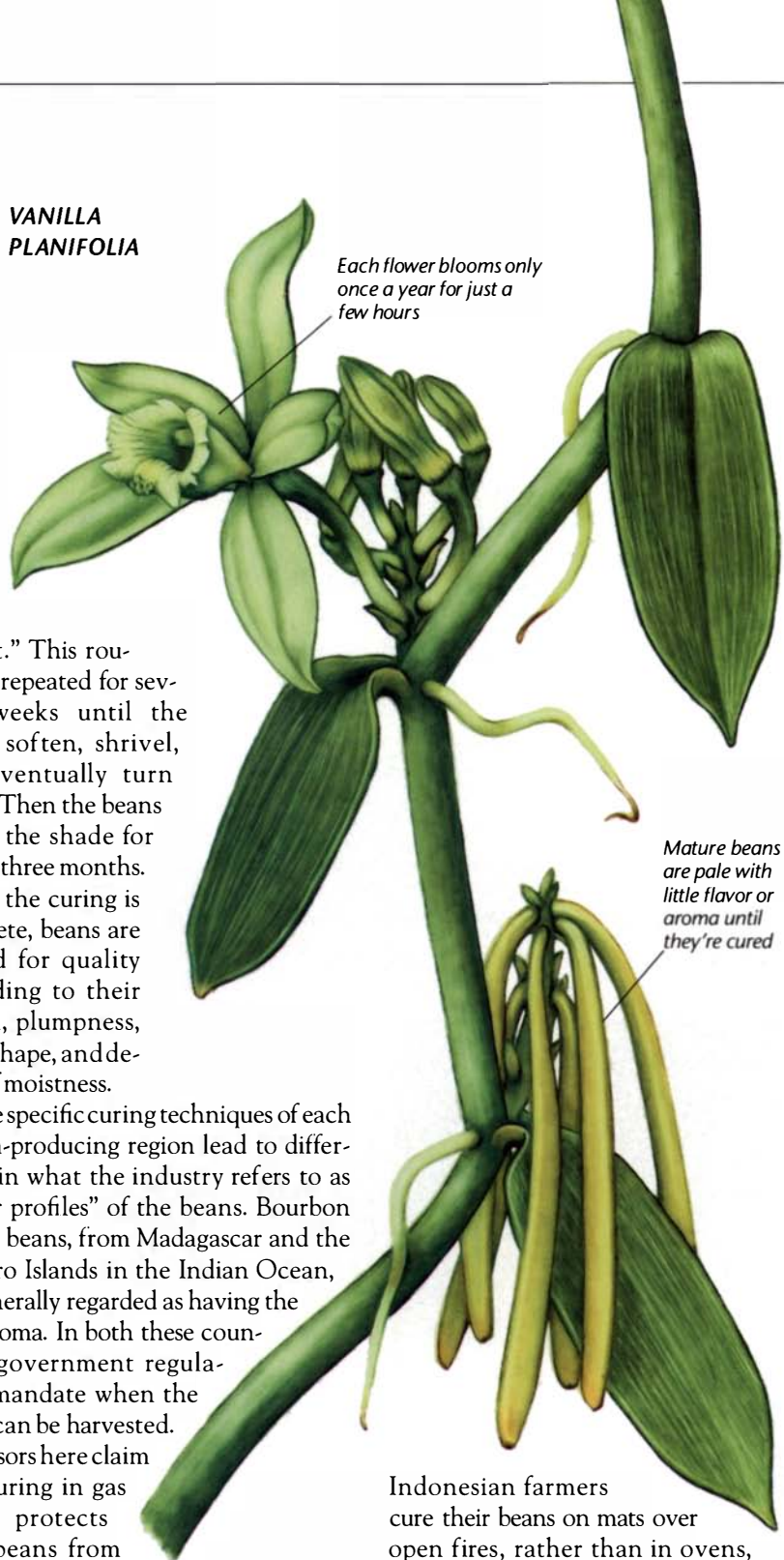
The specific curing techniques of each vanilla-producing region lead to differences in what the industry refers to as “flavor profiles” of the beans. Bourbon vanilla beans, from Madagascar and the Comoro Islands in the Indian Ocean, are generally regarded as having the best aroma. In both these countries, government regulations mandate when the beans can be harvested. Processors here claim that curing in gas ovens protects their beans from the inconsistencies of nature and ensures that their beans have a uniformly sweet, buttery flavor. Mexican vanilla is similar to Bourbon, but it is further characterized as dusty and nutlike.

Indonesian beans have an entirely different profile, related to what some feel are inferior curing practices. Because harvest here is not government-regulated, beans are often picked prematurely.

Indonesian farmers cure their beans on mats over open fires, rather than in ovens, which makes the process more difficult to control. Although they’re considered to be of very poor quality, Indonesian beans are often sought for the smoky note they lend to extracts. Indonesian vanilla beans are described as woody, herbal, harsh, or nutty. They are almost never as sweet or as mellow as Bourbon beans.

Tahitian vanilla beans are the fruit of a different species of orchid than other vanillas and are immediately distin-

**VANILLA
PLANIFOLIA**



guishable by their strong floral aroma. Processors here rely entirely on primitive methods to cure their beans, eschewing all modern technology, including ovens. But because they produce only a small crop, they are able to pay the utmost attention to the quality of their curing process.

Because vanilla production is so time-consuming and much of the work is done by hand, vanilla ranks among the most expensive flavorings in the world.

COOKING WITH VANILLA

Like salt, vanilla has the ability to bring out the flavor of other ingredients without necessarily making its own taste known. Chocolate tastes almost bland without vanilla as a counterpoint. Caramel, coffee, coconut, and rum are especially well paired with vanilla. When used with fruit, particularly tropical fruits such as mango and papaya, vanilla enhances their natural sweetness while playing down their acidity. Vanilla is often identified as a component of oak-aged wines and this has led some cooks to make a connection between vanilla and savory foods. More and more, vanilla is finding its way to the other side of the kitchen, where it is sometimes used to flavor rabbit and seafood dishes. There are cooks who claim that lobster and vanilla go particularly well together. But to best appreciate vanilla as its own delicious and

complex flavor, there is no better medium than milk-based desserts like ice cream and custards.

Whole vanilla beans are used primarily for making infusions. Their flavor is easily absorbed when steeped in a neutral base such as an egg custard to be used for ice cream or pastry cream. After steeping, the beans can be rinsed, left to dry, and used again as long as the bean retains its scent; when the aroma has faded, it's time to replace the bean. Wrapped in plastic and refrigerated in a tightly sealed glass jar, vanilla beans keep indefinitely. Cooks who want a more intense vanilla flavor split the beans and scrape out the seeds to use for flavoring.

Vanilla powder is preferred by some pastry chefs. Made from dehydrated vanilla extract and dextrose, it can be used in doughs and batters without adding any liquid.

Extract concentrates both the flavor and aroma of vanilla beans, and because it's liquid, it's easily dispersed. In a process similar to percolating coffee, extract is produced by circulating alcohol and water through chopped beans. Some producers are adamant that cold extraction of vanilla is the only way to retrieve the bean's true flavor without altering it. Others maintain that heat is necessary to fully dislodge all the flavoring compounds from the beans. Like wine, vanilla extracts become softer and fuller

over time. Most commercial extracts age at least a few months just in the time it takes to move through the retail channels. Other producers deliberately age their extracts for a year or more.

SOURCES FOR VANILLA

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Henry Todd, Jr., is a market analyst for Zink & Triest, the largest buyer and seller of vanilla beans in the world. ♦



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CALIFORNIA

Dinners—Twelve Days of Christmas, December 7–18, Meadowood Resort in the Napa Valley. Twelve dinners and wine pairings prepared by prominent chefs including, Madeleine Kamman, Elka Gilmore, Roy Breiman, Christian Delouvrier, and Susan Spicer. Dinner includes an overnight stay at the Meadowood Resort. For information, call 800/458-8080.

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Classes—Cooking School of the Rockies, Boulder. French Techniques I, II & III: on-going courses year-round. December 7: Holiday Champagne Tasting and Food Matching. December 13: Holiday Desserts—Festive and Easy. January 16: Just French Bread. January 18: Fireside Dinners—Stews, Ragouts and Chilies. January 23: North by Northwest—Great American Regional Cooking. January 26: Wine Tasting & Food Matching. January 30 & 31: All-New Citrus Desserts and Great Sweet & Savory Italian Baking for Entertaining with Nick Malgieri. Call 303/494-7988.

CONNECTICUT

Classes—Prudence Sloane's Cooking School, Hampton. Full participation workshops and dinner demonstration classes. December 2–3: Italian Pasta; December 17: Game Cookery—Wild Duck & Geese. For brochure and information, call 203/455-0596.

Classes—Hay Day's Cooking School, Westport, Greenwich, Ridgefield, and Scarsdale, NY. December 1: Spago Desserts with Mary Bergin. December 7: Holiday Hors d'Oeuvres with Lauren Groveman. For information, call Nicole Chagas at 203/221-0100.

FLORIDA

Festival—6th Annual South Florida International Wine & Food Festival, January 18–22, Doral Ocean Beach Resort, Miami Beach. For information, call Tim Brigham at 800/22-EVENT.

LOUISIANA

Dinner—Dinner of the Decade, December 4, Windsor Court Hotel, New Orleans. Dinner sponsored by the James Beard Foundation featuring chefs Emeril Lagasse, Larry Forgione, Nancy Silverton, Charlie Trotter, Kevin Graham, Patrick Clark, Mark Peel, and Roger Vergé. Call Marti Dalton at 504/524-4241.

NEW MEXICO

Culinary Vacations—Jane Butel's Cooking School, Sheraton Old Town Hotel, Albuquerque. Demonstrations, week-long and weekend classes in New Mexican and Southwestern cookery led by cookbook author Jane Butel. Tours available to the Santa Fe area. For information, call 800/473-8226.

NEW YORK

Classes—The Chocolate Gallery, New York. Baking, cake decorating and chocolate candy-making courses. December 5: Gingerbread House and Christmas in Buttercream. December 6: Tea-Time Cookies I. December 7 & 14: Fruitcake. December 12: Australian cake decorating workshop. December 15: Rolled Buttercream. For information, call 212/675-CAKE. **Dinners**—Friends of the Beard House, New York. Dinners benefiting the James Beard foundation to be

held most evenings in December. For a schedule and reservations, call 212/675-4984 or 800/362-3273.

Classes—The French Culinary Institute, New York. Day and evening career programs and mini-programs in modern French classical cooking techniques. For schedules and information, call 212/219-8890.

PENNSYLVANIA

Classes—Ice Cream Short Course, January 3–13, Pennsylvania State University, University Park. Intensive ice-cream making course which includes the science and technology of ice cream. Classes are 8 A.M. to 5 P.M., plus night labs and a final exam. For information, call 814/865-8301.

TENNESSEE

Competition & Workshops—10th Annual Gingerbread House Competition and Display, December 4–18, Loews Vanderbilt Plaza Hotel, Nashville. Contest entry deadline: December 2, 5 P.M. December 3, 4, 8, 10: Children's Gingerbread Workshops. December 11: Family Holiday Brunch. For information, call Bonnie Lawry at 615/291-7210 ext. 209.

FRANCE

Culinary Vacation—Lyon Vous Aimerez Culinary Tour, January 20–31. Held in conjunction with the Boccuse d'Or and the World Pastry Cup competitions, the one-week tour includes viewing of the competitions, excursions to local artisans, markets, restaurants, and vineyards, as well as sightseeing and shopping in Paris. For information, call 312/663-5701.

Cooking Classes—Cooking with the Masters: Jean-Pierre Silva, January 31 through February 5, Le Vieux Moulin, Bouilland. Classical and regional cuisine of France, practical French cooking, culinary terms and service, and industry related visits. For information, call 312/663-5701.

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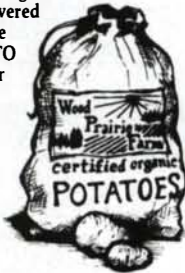
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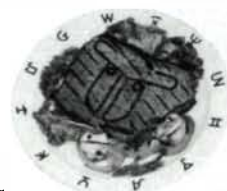


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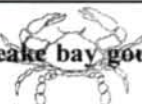
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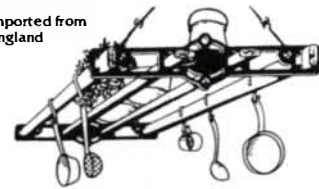
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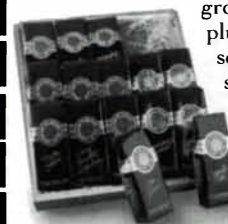
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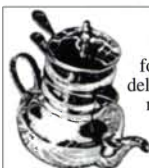
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Recipe Roulette



moon of paper on my plate. My dinner seemed to be sealed inside. It was cool to the touch and opened to reveal a raw potato, a raw carrot, a raw onion, and a large piece of fish, slightly opaque at the edges. "It's a new recipe," the hostess said, uncertainly. "It said to seal everything in parchment and simmer it for ten minutes to conserve vitamins and minerals." It did. They were all still in the fish, potato, carrot, and onion and always would be.

No one said, "Hey, this isn't done!" I guess we lost our nerve or were afraid of offending Miss Manners. We made conversation, nibbled at the edible corner of the fish, filled up on bread, and moved most of the food around and around on our plates. Her carrot cake was wonderful. Everyone had seconds.

No, I take it back. To be honest, I didn't really lose my nerve. When I saw all that raw stuff, my culinary life flashed before my eyes. I saw a famous leg of lamb dinner I put on once that I'd like to forget. Guests at the meal smiled through their disappointment, too. We're still friends. Right there in Menlo Park, I just passed on their courtesy.

In the '50s, June Platt was doing *crème brûlée* before most of us could pronounce it. Hers is still my favorite recipe. In fact, *The June Platt Cook Book* is my bible. Recipes for Mother's Moonlight Cabbage, Cream of Tapioca Veal Broth, and Sweetbreads Hollywood à la Belle Meunière were irresistible. Most of all, I wanted to try Poached Leg of Lamb with Sauce Béarnaise. It doesn't sound like much, but the recipe was a production. It served six to eight. I invited six for dinner at eight.

"Never have I eaten anything as superbly delicate," Platt exclaimed in the recipe. I'd do anything for such unforgettable results.

And the result was unforgettable. But first I had to sew the lamb in a piece of old linen that had been boiled and hung on the oven door to dry. I don't know why. It was part of the recipe. A pillowcase wouldn't do. Quoting Mme. Brissaud, the recipe's originator, Platt was adamant

about linen. The only old linen in my house was a napkin the size of a card-table cover, one of a dozen I'd inherited from my grandmother. At this point in the recipe, Mme. Brissaud cries, "Voilà!" and calls for ½ cup pepper, 1 tablespoon salt, and 12 juniper berries. She heats a large pot of water, and tosses the lamb in with the spices.

"Allow to simmer ever so gently, partially covered, 15 minutes for each pound, and not a minute longer," Platt warns. "When cooked the correct amount of time, remove from the water, cut away the linen, and place the lamb on a hot platter. Carve as you would a roast of lamb. The lamb should be pink in the center."

Mine was not pink anywhere. It was blue, slightly warm and blue—dead raw. Conversation stopped in midsentence when I set the lamb on the table. "Nice and rare," I blurted. Then, like my Menlo Park hostess, I put on my best face and served it forth, slipped a few limp slices on plates, and covered my mistakes with béarnaise sauce. Guests ate a lot of salad and vegetables. We talked about politics. I owe a lifelong debt to everyone there for not asking, "What is this supposed to be—lamb tartare?" or "Could you move my piece a little closer to the stove?"

As for grandmother's napkin, it sustained third-degree stains that not even industrial-strength bleach removed. One of us will find a paper napkin in his lap if I'm ever foolish enough to invite twelve people to a white-tablecloth dinner.

And I may. For me and cooks like me—you know who you are—dinner parties have the dangerous excitement of Russian roulette. They're not so much about eating as they are about entertainment. I have a fantasy of being the first to pull off Harvard Beet Soufflé, say, or Steamed Lobster with Grits. I imagine guests crying out with delight at first bite, and jumping up to carry me around the table on their shoulders.

If it doesn't work? Well, I'll call it Harvard Beet Pudding or Lobster Tartare and everyone eats a lot of bread and salad. Hey, it's a growth experience. At least I won't lose another of grandma's napkins.

—Kit Snedaker,
Santa Monica, California ♦

We buy stories about culinary adventures. Send them to Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

For some of us, entertaining is the same as playing the lottery or entering the Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes. A dinner party is just an excuse to try out at least one new complicated recipe, if not a whole menu.

I used to think cooks who take risks like that were in the minority, but now I'm not so sure. At a recent dinner party, the hostess, flushed with pride, embarrassment, or a hot oven, served what she called "asparagus pudding." I knew better. It was a fallen soufflé.

Like me, in the kitchen she becomes one of the Flying Wallendas, up there on a high wire without a net. Never mind. Asparagus pudding tasted swell.

Then a week later I sat down to a dinner for six in Menlo Park and faced a half-

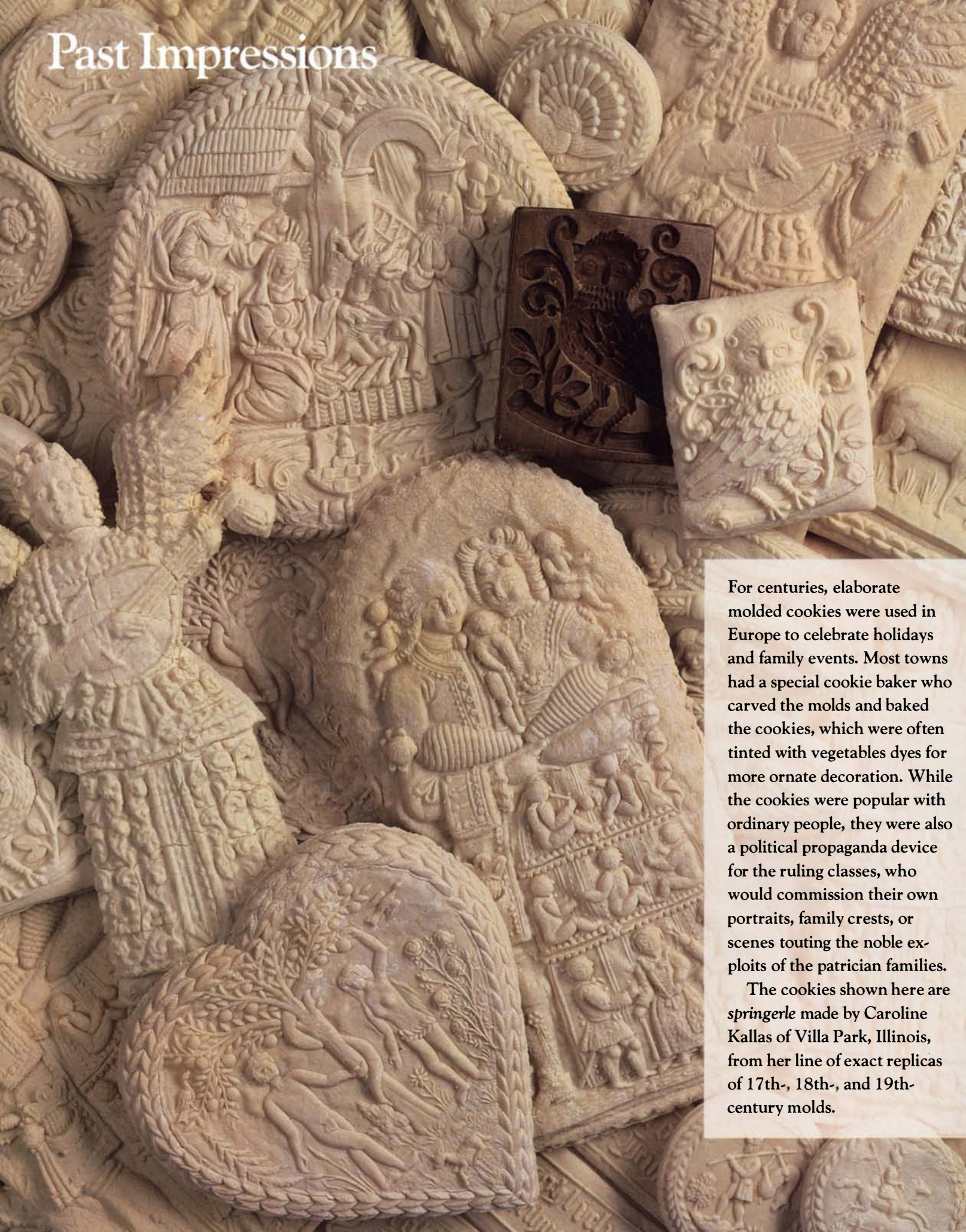
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Past Impressions



For centuries, elaborate molded cookies were used in Europe to celebrate holidays and family events. Most towns had a special cookie baker who carved the molds and baked the cookies, which were often tinted with vegetable dyes for more ornate decoration. While the cookies were popular with ordinary people, they were also a political propaganda device for the ruling classes, who would commission their own portraits, family crests, or scenes touting the noble exploits of the patrician families.

The cookies shown here are *springerle* made by Caroline Kallas of Villa Park, Illinois, from her line of exact replicas of 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century molds.